



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TASK-BASED ROLE-PLAY AND DRAMA TECHNIQUES AS CREATIVE CATALYSTS FOR ENHANCING EFL PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Arlette J. Viviane HOUNHANOU, Coffi Martinien ZOUNHIN TOBOULA and
Assogba Evariste KOTTIN

Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC), Bénin ; Laboratoire du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (Labo-GRAD)

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 17th May, 2026
Received in revised form
20th June, 2026
Accepted 27th July, 2026
Published online 31st August, 2026

Keywords:

Pragmatic, task-based, role-play, drama,
EFL speech, autonomy, sociocultural
theory.

ABSTRACT

Despite decades of EFL instruction, learners often achieve grammatical accuracy while remaining pragmatically incompetent, unable to produce contextually appropriate speech acts in real social interaction (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). This study addresses the critical gap in pragmatic instruction within low-resource university contexts by investigating the effect of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques as creative catalysts for enhancing EFL pragmatic competence. Traditional form-focused pedagogy fails to provide the embodied, affective, and contextualized practice necessary for the acquisition of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms (Taguchi, 2015, p. 15). To examine the extent to which Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques improve EFL learners' performance and awareness of speech acts, politeness strategies, and sociocultural appropriateness. A 14-week quasi-experimental mixed-methods design was employed with 92 EFL university students. The experimental group (n = 46) received instruction through task-based scenarios enacted via role-play and process drama, while the control group (n = 46) received standard communicative tasks. Data were collected through pre/post Discourse Completion Tests, video-recorded role-play performances, and learner reflective journals. Quantitative data were analyzed using ANCOVA, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174). The study was grounded in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) and Pragmatic Theory (Leech, 1983, p. 11). The experimental group demonstrated statistically significant gains in the production of requests, apologies, and refusals, and in ratings of sociopragmatic appropriateness compared to the control group, $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$. Qualitative findings revealed three key themes: reduced speaking anxiety, heightened awareness of cultural norms, and increased learner agency. Learners described the drama space as a "safe rehearsal for real life" (Van Ments, 1999, p. 21), where mistakes were depersonalized and pragmatic experimentation was encouraged. This study concludes that Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques function as powerful, low-resource pedagogical tools that transform pragmatic competence from abstract knowledge into embodied performance. It is recommended that EFL curricula integrate "Pragmatic Drama Units" and that teachers be trained as facilitators of dramatic interaction (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9). Future research should explore longitudinal transfer and the use of multimodal drama for intercultural pragmatic development. By repositioning the classroom as a laboratory of social action, this approach offers a motivating and equitable pathway toward communicative and intercultural competence.

*Corresponding author:
Dr. Coffi Martinien Zounhin Toboula

Copyright©2026, Arlette J. Viviane HOUNHANOU et al. 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Arlette J. Viviane HOUNHANOU, Coffi Martinien ZOUNHIN TOBOULA and Assogba Evariste KOTTIN. 2026. "Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques as Creative Catalysts for Enhancing EFL Pragmatic Competence." *International Journal of Current Research*, 18, (08), 37981-37991.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, communicative competence has become the central goal of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education worldwide. However, decades of research reveal a persistent paradox: many EFL learners achieve high levels of grammatical accuracy yet remain unable to use language appropriately in authentic social contexts (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). This is specifically a shortfall in pragmatic competence, the ability to understand and produce language suited to context, interlocutor, and communicative goal (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 45).

Traditional EFL classrooms, particularly in low-resource contexts, remain dominated by form-focused instruction and decontextualized drills (Alabi, 2020, p. 102). While learners can produce grammatically correct sentences, they frequently commit pragmatic errors: they may sound too direct, too formal, or culturally inappropriate when making requests, apologies, or refusals. As Leech (1983, p. 11) argues, "grammar tells us what is possible, pragmatics tells us what is appropriate." In response, scholars have called for pedagogical approaches that move beyond the textbook and place learners in meaningful social interaction. Two approaches have emerged as particularly promising:

Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003, p. 16) and Drama in Language Education (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9). When combined, Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques create a simulated social world where learners can rehearse language, identity, and cultural norms in a low-risk environment. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) Sociocultural Theory, this approach positions the classroom as a Zone of Proximal Development where language is learned through action and mediation.

Rationale for the Study: The rationale for this study is threefold: theoretical, pedagogical, and contextual. Theoretically, pragmatics is now recognized as a core component of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 45), yet instructed pragmatics remains under-researched compared to grammar and vocabulary (Taguchi, 2015, p. 15). There is a need to identify pedagogical interventions that effectively proceduralize pragmatic knowledge. Pedagogically, drama and role-play have long been advocated for their affective and cognitive benefits. Maley and Duff (2005, p. 3) note that drama reduces anxiety and increases motivation, while Van Ments (1999, p. 21) describes role-play as "safe rehearsal for real life."

However, few studies have systematically integrated these techniques within a Task-Based framework to target specific speech acts and measure pragmatic development empirically. Contextually, in many Sub-Saharan African universities, EFL classes are large, resources are limited, and opportunities for authentic interaction are scarce (Dakpo, 2019, p. 34). Technology-based solutions are often unaffordable. Task-Based Role-Play and Drama offer a highly motivating, equitable, and low-cost alternative that requires only a classroom, a teacher-facilitator, and learner imagination. This study is therefore both timely and necessary.

Statement of the Problem: Despite the recognized importance of pragmatic competence, EFL learners in university contexts continue to experience pragmatic failure. They may transfer L1 norms, use inappropriate levels of politeness, or avoid speech acts altogether due to anxiety and lack of practice (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 45). Current instructional methods provide insufficient opportunities for contextualized, embodied practice of social language use. While the literature supports the potential of drama (Holden, 1981, p. 1) and tasks (Ellis, 2003, p. 16) separately, there is a dearth of empirical research examining their synergistic effect as "creative catalysts" for pragmatic development. Specifically, no study to date has investigated this integration within a West African EFL context. This gap limits our understanding of how to effectively foster pragmatic competence in resource-constrained settings. Therefore, this study addresses the problem: To what extent can Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques enhance EFL learners' pragmatic competence?

Main Objective: The main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques on enhancing EFL learners' pragmatic competence in a university context.

Specific Objectives: To achieve the main objective, this study seeks to:

- Examine the effect of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques on learners' pragmalinguistic performance in

producing speech acts of requests, apologies, and refusals.

- Assess the impact of these techniques on learners' sociopragmatic awareness and appropriateness in varied social contexts.
- Explore EFL learners' perceptions of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques in relation to motivation, anxiety, and learner autonomy.
- Propose pedagogical guidelines for integrating drama-based tasks into the EFL curriculum to foster pragmatic competence.

Research Questions: This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques improve EFL learners' pragmalinguistic performance in speech acts compared to traditional instruction?

RQ2: What is the effect of these techniques on EFL learners' sociopragmatic awareness and appropriateness?

RQ3: How do EFL learners perceive the use of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques in developing their motivation and confidence for pragmatic performance?

Research Hypotheses: Based on the research questions and literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

RH1: There is a statistically significant difference in the pragmalinguistic performance of EFL learners exposed to Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques and those exposed to traditional instruction.

RH2: There is a statistically significant difference in the sociopragmatic appropriateness scores of EFL learners exposed to Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques and those exposed to traditional instruction.

RH3: Learners' engagement in Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques significantly enhances their reported motivation and reduces their anxiety related to pragmatic performance.

Significance of the Study: This study is significant because it bridges theory and practice by providing empirical evidence for an innovative, low-cost pedagogy. For teachers, it offers concrete strategies for teaching pragmatics. For curriculum designers, it provides a model for integrating creativity and communication. For learners, it promises a more engaging and effective path to becoming socially competent communicators.

0.CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section critically reviews the literature relevant to the development of EFL pragmatic competence through Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques. The review is organized into four strands: 1) Conceptualizations of pragmatic competence, 2) Instructed pragmatics and current gaps, 3) Task-Based Language Teaching as a vehicle for pragmatics, and 4) Drama and Role-Play as embodied catalysts for social language. The chapter concludes by presenting the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Pragmatic Competence in EFL: Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use and interpret language appropriately according to social context, participant roles, and communicative intention (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 45). It comprises two interrelated dimensions. Pragmalinguistics concerns the linguistic resources available for performing speech acts — e.g., modals, hedges, formulaic expressions (Leech, 1983, p. 11). *Sociopragmatics* concerns the social rules governing language use — e.g., when to be direct, how to show politeness, what topics are appropriate (Leech, 1983, p. 11). Kasper and Rose (2002, p. 1) famously noted that L2 learners can be "pragmatically mute": grammatically accurate yet socially ineffective. This is because pragmatic competence is not acquired incidentally to the same degree as grammar (Taguchi, 2015, p. 15). In EFL contexts with limited authentic input, learners often transfer L1 pragmatic norms, leading to pragmatic failure (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 45). This creates a pressing need for explicit, contextualized instruction.

Instructed Pragmatics: Progress and Limitations: A growing body of meta-analytic research confirms that instruction in pragmatics is effective. Taguchi (2015, p. 15) in her comprehensive review found that explicit instruction, consciousness-raising, and practice led to moderate to large gains in both comprehension and production of speech acts. However, three critical limitations persist. First, the problem of transfer. Explicitly taught metapragmatic knowledge often remains declarative and fails to become proceduralized for real-time use (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). Learners "know" the rules but cannot apply them under communicative pressure. Second, the problem of authenticity. Many instructional materials present decontextualized examples that do not reflect the complexity of real interaction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 13). This limits learners' ability to recognize contextual variables. Third, the problem of affect. Pragmatic performance is highly sensitive to anxiety and identity. Learners may avoid face-threatening acts due to fear of negative evaluation (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 45). Traditional classrooms rarely address this affective dimension. These gaps suggest that effective pragmatic instruction must be explicit, contextualized, embodied, and affectively supportive. This is where Task-Based and Drama approaches become relevant.

Task-Based Language Teaching: A Natural Home for Pragmatics: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is defined as an approach where learners perform meaning-focused tasks and language emerges as a tool for task completion (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). TBLT is theoretically aligned with pragmatics for three reasons. First, tasks are inherently pragmatic. To complete a task such as "negotiate a solution" or "apologize to a friend," learners must attend to illocutionary force and politeness (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). Second, TBLT promotes interaction and negotiation of meaning, which Long (1996, p. 451) identifies as the engine of language acquisition. Third, TBLT allows for focus on form *after* meaning, enabling learners to notice pragmatic features in context (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). However, a critical review reveals that most TBLT research targets grammatical or lexical outcomes. Few studies have designed tasks specifically to target pragmatic development (Taguchi, 2015, p. 15). This study addresses that gap by designing tasks whose primary outcome is pragmatic appropriateness.

Drama and Role-Play: Embodied Catalysts for Pragmatic Development: Drama and role-play offer what cognitive approaches cannot: embodiment, emotion, and identity.

Theoretical Foundations: From a Sociocultural Theory perspective (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86), drama creates a Zone of Proximal Development. Learners, in role, can perform beyond their current competence with the support of peers and teacher. Language is not practiced but lived (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 197). Kao and O'Neill (1998, p. 9) argue that process drama allows learners to "step into another world" and experience language as action. This aligns with the concept of "languaging" - using language to mediate cognitive and social activity.

Empirical Evidence: Empirical studies support drama's effect on pragmatics. Holden (1981, p. 1) was among the first to document how role-play provides rehearsal for real-life social encounters. More recently, Piazzoli (2011, p. 56) found that process drama increased learners' pragmatic flexibility and awareness of power dynamics in requests. Crucially, drama addresses the affective filter. Maley and Duff (2005, p. 3) and Van Ments (1999, p. 21) both emphasize that role distance allows learners to take risks: mistakes belong to the character, not the self. This reduces anxiety and increases willingness to experiment with pragmatic forms.

Critical Gap: Despite this evidence, most drama research is qualitative and descriptive. Few studies have used pre/post testing to measure pragmatic gains quantitatively, and none have integrated drama within a rigorous TBLT framework to target specific speech acts. Furthermore, research in African EFL contexts is virtually absent (Alabi, 2020, p. 102). This study fills that methodological and contextual gap.

Synthesis: The Case for Creative Catalysis: The literature suggests that pragmatics requires more than rules. It requires experience. Task-Based Role-Play and Drama synthesize three essential elements:

- Task: Provides a goal and communicative pressure (Ellis, 2003, p. 16).
- Role-Play: Provides social context and perspective-taking (Van Ments, 1999, p. 21).
- Drama: Provides embodiment, emotion, and reflection (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9). Together, they function as "creative catalysts" that transform abstract pragmatic knowledge into situated, agentive performance. This synthesis directly addresses the limitations of current instructed pragmatics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: This study is anchored in two complementary theories.

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006): This theory posits that learning occurs through social interaction mediated by cultural tools. In this study, the dramatic role and the task itself are mediational tools. Through collaborative enactment, learners co-construct pragmatic understanding and internalize social norms (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Pragmatic Theory and Politeness (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987): Leech's (1983, p. 11) Interpersonal Rhetoric and Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 60) Politeness Theory

provide the analytical framework for evaluating learners' speech acts. They allow us to assess not just what learners say, but how appropriately they manage face, distance, and power. The critical review reveals a clear convergence: pragmatic competence is essential, difficult to acquire incidentally, and poorly served by traditional methods. Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques offer an innovative, theoretically sound, and practically viable solution. By merging task, role, and drama, this study proposes a new model for making pragmatics visible, felt, and learnable in EFL classrooms.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Model in Narrative Form: This study proposes an integrative model of Creative Catalysis grounded in three interlocking theoretical pillars: Sociocultural Theory, Task-Based Language Teaching, and Pragmatic/Politeness Theory. At the core of the model is the dependent variable: EFL Pragmatic Competence. This competence is conceptualized as the learner's ability to produce and interpret speech acts appropriately according to context, interlocutor, and communicative intention. It has two dimensions: pragmalinguistic competence, which refers to the linguistic resources used to perform speech acts, and sociopragmatic competence, which refers to the ability to calibrate language to social variables such as power, distance, and imposition. The independent variable is the pedagogical intervention: Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques. This intervention operates through three synergistic mechanisms that correspond to the three theoretical pillars. First, drawing from Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 197), the drama space and the role itself function as mediational tools. They create a collaborative Zone of Proximal Development where learners, supported by peers and the teacher-as-director, can perform speech acts beyond their current independent capacity. The role provides psychological safety and allows for experimentation without personal risk.

Second, drawing from Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003, p. 16; Long, 1996, p. 451), each dramatic scenario is structured as a goal-oriented task. The task provides communicative purpose and creates authentic pressure to use language to achieve a non-linguistic outcome. This generates negotiation of meaning, pushed output, and opportunities for a post-task focus on pragmatic form. Thus, drama is not random improvisation but structured, outcome-driven action. Third, drawing from Pragmatic Theory and Politeness Theory (Leech, 1983, p. 11; Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60), the content of the tasks and the criteria for success are defined. Learners are guided to attend to both pragmalinguistic form and sociopragmatic appropriateness. The theories provide the lens for analyzing whether learners can modify their language according to contextual variables and manage face in interaction. In this model, Drama provides embodiment and affect, Role-Play provides social context and identity, and Task provides communicative purpose. The interaction of these three elements catalyzes the transformation of declarative pragmatic knowledge into procedural, context-sensitive performance. As Kao and O'Neill (1998, p. 9) state, in process drama "language is not learned, it is experienced." This framework argues that such experience, when structured and reflected upon, is the most powerful pathway to pragmatic competence. The model also recognizes mediating variables such as learner motivation, anxiety, and metapragmatic

awareness, which were shown in the literature and in this study to influence how effectively learners engage with the intervention.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and measurability, the key constructs in this study are operationally defined as follows:

Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques: Operationally, this refers to a 14-week instructional intervention consisting of 28 sessions. Each session follows a three-phase Task-Based framework: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task. During the task cycle, learners work in small groups to plan, rehearse, and perform role-plays or short process drama scenarios that require them to achieve a specific communicative goal, such as making a request or refusing an invitation. The teacher functions as facilitator and director (Ellis, 2003, p. 16; Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9).

EFL Pragmatic Competence: Operationally, this is defined as the learner's ability to produce contextually appropriate speech acts in English. It is measured in two ways:

- **Pragmalinguistic Competence:** Measured by the Discourse Completion Test. It refers to the range and accuracy of linguistic devices used to perform speech acts, including internal modifiers such as "could, would" and external modifiers such as grounders and apologies (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 13).
- **Sociopragmatic Competence:** Measured by the Role-Play Performance Test. It refers to the learner's ability to vary language according to social variables of power, distance, and degree of imposition as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 60).

Creative Catalyst: Operationally, this refers to the synergistic effect by which the combination of task, role, and drama accelerates pragmatic development beyond what traditional instruction achieves. It is evidenced by statistically significant gains in post-test scores and by qualitative reports of increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and heightened awareness (Maley & Duff, 2005, p. 3).

Sociocultural Mediation: Operationally, this refers to the support provided by peers, teacher, and the dramatic context that enables learners to perform within their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It is observed through collaborative planning, peer feedback during rehearsal, and teacher scaffolding during performance.

Task Outcome: Operationally, this refers to the non-linguistic goal that learners must achieve during the role-play, such as "convince the professor to grant an extension" or "resolve a conflict with a roommate." Success is judged not by grammatical correctness alone but by whether the goal was achieved through socially appropriate language (Ellis, 2003, p. 16).

Concluding Remarks of the Conceptual Framework: In summary, this conceptual framework posits that EFL pragmatic competence is not taught directly but is catalyzed. When learners are placed in goal-driven, socially mediated, and embodied dramatic tasks, they are compelled to use language as a tool for social action. Through this process, they

develop both the forms and the social judgment required for pragmatic competence. The framework therefore provides both the theoretical rationale and the operational blueprint for the intervention and analysis in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the research design, population, sampling procedures, instruments, intervention, and data analysis techniques used to investigate the effect of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques on EFL learners' pragmatic competence. The methodology was designed to provide empirical, rigorous, and contextually relevant evidence while honoring the creative and social nature of the intervention (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design with a pre-test, post-test, and non-equivalent control group (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174). The design was chosen for three reasons. First, the quasi-experimental component allows for the measurement of causal effect by comparing an experimental group receiving the intervention with a control group receiving standard instruction. This addresses Research Questions 1 and 2 and Hypotheses 1 and 2. Second, the mixed-methods component integrates quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more complete understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174). Quantitative data measure gains in pragmatic performance, while qualitative data explore learners' perceptions, motivation, and anxiety as per Research Question 3. Third, this design is ethically and practically suitable for educational contexts where random assignment is not feasible (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164).

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Population: The target population comprised all first-year undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the Department of English at the University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin, during the 2025-2026 academic year. **Sample and Sampling Technique:** A purposive sample of 92 students from two intact classes was selected. Intact classes were used to avoid disruption to the university timetable (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164). One class ($n = 46$) was randomly assigned as the Experimental Group and the other ($n = 46$) as the Control Group. Both groups were comparable in terms of age, L1 background, and prior English proficiency as confirmed by the pre-test.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Three instruments were used to ensure methodological triangulation:

Discourse Completion Test (DCT): A 12-item written DCT was developed to measure pragmalinguistic performance in three speech acts: requests, apologies, and refusals (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 13). Each item presented a scenario varying in social distance, power, and degree of imposition, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 60) variables. The DCT was validated by three experts and piloted with 20 students. Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$.

Role-Play Performance Test: An oral role-play test was used to assess sociopragmatic appropriateness in real-time interaction (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p.45). Students performed 3 scenarios with a research assistant. Performances were video-recorded and rated by two independent raters using a 5-point rubric adapted from Bachman and Palmer (2010, p. 45). Inter-rater reliability: Cohen's $\kappa = .88$.

Learner Reflective Journal and Semi-Structured Interview: To answer RQ3, learners in the experimental group kept weekly reflective journals and 12 participants were interviewed post-intervention. Questions explored motivation, anxiety, and perceptions of autonomy (Maley & Duff, 2005, p. 3). This aligns with qualitative inquiry in applied linguistics (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164).

THE INTERVENTION: TASK-BASED ROLE-PLAY AND DRAMA PROGRAM

The intervention lasted 14 weeks, 2 sessions of 90 minutes per week. Experimental Group: Received instruction through 14 Task-Based Drama Units. Each unit followed Ellis's (2003, p. 16) TBLT framework:

- Pre-task: Introduction of pragmatic target and modeling of speech acts using Leech's (1983, p. 11) politeness maxims.
- Task Cycle: Learners worked in groups to plan and enact a role-play or process drama scenario. Scenarios were authentic and culturally relevant, e.g., "Negotiating an assignment extension with a professor" (Van Ments, 1999, p. 21). The teacher functioned as facilitator/director (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9).
- Post-task: Language focus. The class analyzed video excerpts to notice pragmatic features and reflect on appropriateness within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Control Group: Received standard communicative instruction focused on the same speech acts but without role-play or drama. Activities included textbook dialogues and grammar drills.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Week 1: Pre-test DCT and Role-Play for both groups.

Weeks 2-15: Intervention for Experimental Group. Control Group received regular instruction. Experimental Group submitted weekly journals.

Week 16: Post-test DCT and Role-Play for both groups.

Week 17: Semi-structured interviews with 12 experimental group participants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Data: Pre-test and post-test DCT and Role-Play scores were analyzed using SPSS v.29. ANCOVA was used to compare post-test scores while controlling for pre-test scores, as recommended for quasi-experimental designs (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164). Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d . **Qualitative Data:** Reflective journals and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87).

Coding focused on themes of anxiety, motivation, agency, and awareness of norms. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking and peer debriefing.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms. Participants were informed they could withdraw at any time without penalty (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174).

CONCLUDING REMARKS: This methodology provides a robust, innovative, and context-sensitive framework for investigating creative pedagogies. By combining experimental rigor with qualitative depth, the study is positioned to generate both statistically valid and humanistically rich findings on how drama can catalyze pragmatic competence.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS: This section presents the findings of the 14-week intervention and analyzes them in relation to the study's research questions and theoretical framework. Data were generated from three sources: a Discourse Completion Test measuring pragmalinguistic performance, a video-recorded Role-Play Test assessing sociopragmatic appropriateness, and reflective journals plus semi-structured interviews exploring learner perceptions. Following Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p. 174), a convergent mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitative patterns are explained and humanized through qualitative voices. The analysis demonstrates how Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques operated not merely as classroom activities, but as creative catalysts that transformed declarative pragmatic knowledge into embodied, context-sensitive performance.

EFFECT ON PRAGMALINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE: REQUESTS, APOLOGIES, AND REFUSALS: Research Question 1: To what extent do Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques improve EFL learners' pragmalinguistic performance in speech acts compared to traditional instruction?

At pre-test, both experimental and control groups displayed similar pragmalinguistic profiles. Learners produced grammatically accurate but pragmatically minimal responses. Requests were typically direct imperatives. Apologies lacked accounts or offers of repair. Refusals were blunt and unmitigated. Post-intervention analysis revealed a clear divergence. The experimental group demonstrated substantial development in linguistic complexity and mitigation. Learners began to routinely employ syntactic downgraders such as past tense modals "could, would", and lexical downgraders such as "just, maybe". More importantly, they sequenced speech acts with supportive moves. In apology scenarios, for instance, learners moved from "Sorry" to multi-move sequences: expression of apology + account + offer of repair + promise of forbearance. This mirrors Bardovi-Harlig's (2001, p. 13) observation that pragmalinguistic competence requires access to a repertoire of forms, not a single correct sentence. The drama tasks created repeated opportunities for form-function mapping under communicative pressure. As Ellis (2003, p. 16) argues in Task-Based Language Teaching, when learners must achieve a non-linguistic outcome, they are pushed to expand and fine-tune their linguistic resources. By contrast, the control group showed minimal change. Their post-test language

remained structurally simple, suggesting that decontextualized practice does not proceduralize pragmalinguistic knowledge (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). The significant difference between groups confirms that embodiment and goal-orientation accelerated the move from knowing about language to knowing how to use it.

EFFECT ON SOCIOPRAGMATIC APPROPRIATENESS AND CONTEXTUAL SENSITIVITY: Research Question 2: What is the effect of these techniques on EFL learners' sociopragmatic awareness and appropriateness? The role-play data revealed the most compelling evidence of transformation. Sociopragmatics concerns the ability to match language to social variables of power, distance, and imposition (Leech, 1983, p. 11; Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60). Before the intervention, learners across both groups applied a one-size-fits-all approach. A request to a close friend and a request to a dean were often linguistically identical, indicating a lack of sociopragmatic calibration. After the intervention, the experimental group showed a qualitatively different performance. In high-power, high-distance contexts, learners demonstrated marked deference. They opened with greetings and apologies for imposition, used indirect question forms, provided extensive grounders, and closed with expressions of gratitude. In peer-to-peer, low-distance contexts, they used solidarity markers, humor, and colloquial forms. One participant reflected: "Before drama, I thought politeness was just 'please' and 'thank you'. Now I feel the distance. I feel if I must be indirect." This illustrates Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) concept of internalization: social experience in role becomes internal psychological understanding. The control group, taught through textbook dialogues, did not display this sensitivity. Their language remained static across contexts. This supports Ishihara and Cohen's (2010, p. 45) claim that awareness of contextual variables must be experienced, not just explained. Process drama, as described by Kao and O'Neill (1998, p. 9), allows learners to "live through" different social positions, thereby developing an intuitive feel for appropriateness that tests and textbooks cannot provide.

LEARNER PERCEPTIONS: MOTIVATION, ANXIETY, AND AGENCY: Research Question 3: How do EFL learners perceive the use of Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques in developing their motivation and confidence for pragmatic performance?

Thematic analysis of journals and interviews identified three interlocking themes that explain why the intervention worked. Theme 1: The Safe Space and Reduced Anxiety Learners repeatedly described the drama classroom as a "laboratory" and "rehearsal space." Role distance was central. As one student wrote: "When I am the manager in the role-play, I can say 'no' politely. If I said it as myself, I would be too shy." This confirms Maley and Duff's (2005, p. 3) and Van Ments' (1999, p. 21) argument that role-play depersonalizes error and lowers the affective filter (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). Anxiety reduction created the psychological safety necessary for pragmatic risk-taking.

Theme 2: Motivation through Authentic Purpose

Learners contrasted drama tasks with "boring grammar." The task outcome provided intrinsic motivation. Because the goal was to convince, to negotiate, or to resolve, language became a tool rather than a subject. This aligns with Long's (1996, p.

451) Interaction Hypothesis: negotiation for meaning drives acquisition. Participants reported practicing lines outside class and volunteering to perform, behaviors rarely observed in traditional lessons. Theme 3: Metapragmatic Awareness and Learner Agency The post-task reflection phase was pivotal. Watching video excerpts of their own performance led to critical awareness. Journal entries showed learners analyzing their own politeness choices: "I noticed I interrupted. Next time I will wait and use a softener." This reflects a shift toward autonomy (Benson, 2013, p. 45). Learners moved from passive recipients to active analysts of pragmatic behavior, which Piazzoli (2011, p. 56) identifies as a key outcome of affective engagement in drama.

SYNTHESIS: HOW DRAMA AND TASK WORKED AS "CREATIVE CATALYSTS"

The data converge on three mechanisms through which the intervention catalyzed pragmatic development. First, Embodiment. By physically enacting scenarios, learners anchored abstract pragmatic rules to gesture, tone, and facial expression. This multimodal encoding, supported by Sociocultural Theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 197), made pragmatic knowledge more memorable and retrievable. Second, Perspective-Taking. Taking on different roles forced learners to consider the interlocutor's face and expectations. This directly operationalizes Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 60) Politeness Theory in a lived way. Third, Cyclical Reflection. The TBLT structure of pre-task, task, and post-task (Ellis, 2003, p. 16) created a loop of experience, performance, and analysis. This loop transformed implicit experience into explicit understanding, addressing the persistent problem of transfer identified by Taguchi (2015, p. 15).

SECTION SUMMARY

The findings provide robust evidence that Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques significantly enhance EFL pragmatic competence. Quantitatively, learners developed richer linguistic forms and greater contextual sensitivity. Qualitatively, they became more motivated, less anxious, and more aware of how language works in society. This study therefore confirms that pragmatic competence is not taught, it is performed. When classrooms become stages for social action, learners do not just learn English. They learn how to be in English. This is the essence of communicative and intercultural competence.

DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

This section interprets the core findings of the study and positions them within the theoretical and empirical terrain established in the literature review. The purpose is to move beyond description and to argue, clarify, and synthesize what the results mean for theory, pedagogy, and the lived experience of EFL learners. Using a mixed-methods integrative lens (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174), the discussion demonstrates how Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques functioned as creative catalysts by transforming pragmatic knowledge from abstract rules into socially situated, embodied performance.

DEEPLY ARGUMENTED DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM: The foundational problem addressed by this study is the well-documented paradox of EFL education: learners attain grammatical accuracy yet

remain pragmatically incompetent in authentic social interaction (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). This "pragmatic muteness" persists because traditional classrooms prioritize form over function and treat language as an object rather than a tool for social action (Alabi, 2020, p. 102). Three aspects of the problem were directly targeted. First, the problem of proceduralization. Taguchi (2015, p. 15) argues that explicit metapragmatic instruction often fails to become usable in real-time. The findings here argue that proceduralization occurs when learners must use pragmatic forms to achieve a consequential task outcome. The task creates the need; the drama creates the willingness to take the risk. Second, the problem of context. Bardovi-Harlig (2001, p. 13) notes that decontextualized examples do not develop sociopragmatic sensitivity. The data show that by inhabiting roles of varying power and distance, learners experientially calibrated their language. Pragmatics was not explained, it was felt. Third, the problem of affect. Ishihara and Cohen (2010, p. 45) identify anxiety and identity threat as major barriers to pragmatic performance. The results indicate that the fictional frame of drama depersonalized error and created what Van Ments (1999, p. 21) calls "safe rehearsal for real life." Thus, the research problem was not a learner deficit. It was a pedagogical design deficit. This study argues that when the classroom is reconceived as a laboratory of social action, pragmatic failure becomes pedagogically solvable.

INTERPRETATION OF MAIN RESULTS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Research Question 1 & Hypothesis 1: Pragmalinguistic Performance

RQ1: To what extent do Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques improve EFL learners' pragmalinguistic performance in speech acts? H1: There is a statistically significant difference in pragmalinguistic performance between the experimental and control groups. Supported. The experimental group demonstrated substantial expansion in their linguistic repertoire for requests, apologies, and refusals. Post-intervention, learners routinely used internal modifiers such as past modals "could, would" and external modifiers such as grounders and disarmers. This reflects Swain's (2005, p. 471) Output Hypothesis: communicative pressure pushes learners to notice gaps and modify language. Critically, this expansion was not rote memorization. Because forms were tied to dramatic roles and task goals, learners linked form to social function. This supports Ellis's (2003, p. 16) claim that TBLT promotes focus on form after meaning. Drama amplified this by adding emotional investment. As Maley and Duff (2005, p. 3) contend, when learners care about the outcome of a role, they attend more deeply to the language needed to achieve it.

Research Question 2 & Hypothesis 2: Sociopragmatic Appropriateness

RQ2: What is the effect on EFL learners' sociopragmatic awareness and appropriateness? H2: There is a statistically significant difference in sociopragmatic appropriateness between the experimental and control groups. Supported. This is the most culminant result. The experimental group developed context-sensitive language use aligned with Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 60) variables of power, distance, and imposition. In high-power scenarios, learners used greater indirectness, deference, and mitigation. In peer contexts, they used solidarity and colloquialism. This cannot be explained by

explicit instruction alone. It is best understood through Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In role, learners operated within a Zone of Proximal Development, supported by peers and the teacher-director to perform beyond their independent competence (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 197). Process drama, as theorized by Kao and O'Neill (1998, p. 9), allowed learners to "try on" different social identities and thereby internalize sociopragmatic norms. The control group, lacking embodied experience, showed no such development. This confirms that sociopragmatic competence is acquired through social participation, not through rules.

Research Question 3: Learner Perceptions

RQ3: How do EFL learners perceive these techniques in relation to motivation, anxiety, and autonomy? The qualitative data provide the explanatory mechanism for the quantitative gains. Three themes emerged and are deeply argued below.

- **Affective Decompression:** Learners described the drama space as liberating. Role distance meant mistakes belonged to the character, not the self. This directly lowers the affective filter (Krashen, 1982, p. 21) and is consistent with Piazzoli's (2011, p. 56) finding that drama reduces language anxiety by creating "affective space." Without this safety, learners cannot experiment with face-threatening acts like refusals.
- **Authentic Motivation:** The task outcome gave language a purpose. This aligns with Long's (1996, p. 451) Interaction Hypothesis. Negotiation, clarification, and repair occurred naturally because the task demanded it. Learners reported practicing outside class, an indicator of intrinsic motivation rarely produced by drills.
- **Metapragmatic Agency:** Post-task reflection led to conscious awareness. Learners began to self-analyze their politeness strategies. This reflects a shift toward learner autonomy (Benson, 2013, p. 45) and shows the intervention moved learners from other-regulation to self-regulation, a core SCT principle (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

DIALOGUE WITH THE MOST CULMINANT ASPECTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This study advances the literature in three decisive ways. First, it provides empirical weight to drama research. While foundational works by Holden (1981, p. 1) and Kao and O'Neill (1998, p. 9) are largely qualitative, this study uses quasi-experimental design to demonstrate measurable gains. It answers the call by Taguchi (2015, p. 15) for more rigorous instructional studies in pragmatics. Second, it innovates through synthesis. The literature treats TBLT (Ellis, 2003, p. 16) and Drama (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9) as separate fields. This study argues that they are synergistic. The task supplies the communicative imperative, the role supplies the social context, and the drama supplies the embodiment and affect. Together they address three limitations of current pragmatics instruction: a lack of proceduralization, a lack of context, and a lack of affect. Most pragmatics research occurs in ESL or high-resource settings. By demonstrating significant effects in a West African EFL university, this study shows that creative, low-resource pedagogies can be equitable and effective (Dakpo, 2019, p. 34). This challenges the assumption that technology is required for communicative innovation.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS: The findings strongly corroborate the integrated framework. Sociocultural Theory explains the social mechanism of learning. TBLT explains the structural design. Pragmatic and Politeness Theory (Leech, 1983, p. 11; Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60) defines the target. A new theoretical implication emerges: *_embodiment is a condition for pragmatic internalization_*. Cognitive models must account for the fact that pragmatic competence is not only mental but also physical, emotional, and relational. Language for social action must be learned through social action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: In sum, the data interpretation confirms that the research problem was addressed, the hypotheses were supported, and the research questions were answered. Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques are not enrichment activities. They are central pedagogical tools for developing pragmatic competence. They catalyze learning by making language necessary, safe, and human. This study makes a motivating claim: if our goal is communicative and intercultural competence, then our classrooms must become places where learners can practice being human in the target language.

PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS: If the ultimate goal of EFL education is communicative and intercultural competence, then pedagogy must move beyond accuracy and toward appropriateness, agency, and action. The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques do exactly that. They transform the classroom from a site of linguistic drilling into a laboratory of social life (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This section translates evidence into practice. It articulates the pedagogical and didactic implications, offers concrete recommendations for teachers, institutions, and policymakers, and proposes innovative directions for future research. The aim of overarching is to ensure that the gains observed in this study become sustainable, scalable, and equitable across EFL contexts.

PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS:
Implication 1: From Teaching Language Forms to Teaching Social Actions: The study confirms that pragmatic competence is not acquired incidentally (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). Didactically, this calls for a paradigm shift. Curriculum units should be organized around speech acts and social goals, "negotiating," "apologizing," "refusing," rather than around discrete grammar points (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). Language becomes the means, not the end. Assessment must mirror this by evaluating appropriateness in context, as advocated by Bachman and Palmer (2010, p. 45).
Implication 2: Embodiment and Affect as Core Conditions for Learning: Pragmatic performance is emotionally charged and identity-related. The qualitative data show that learners could only experiment with face-threatening acts when the affective filter was lowered (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). Drama provides this safety through role distance (Van Ments, 1999, p. 21). Pedagogically, this means teachers must intentionally design for embodiment: gestures, tones, proxemics, and emotions are not extras. They are data through which learners internalize sociopragmatic norms (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 197).
Implication 3: The Teacher as Facilitator-Director, Not Lecturer: In a drama-based task cycle, the teacher's role shifts. During the pre-task, the teacher models and raises awareness

(Taguchi, 2015, p. 15). During the task, the teacher is a director who scaffolds within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). During the post-task, the teacher is a facilitator of reflection. This demands new professional competencies in classroom management, improvisation, and feedback (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9). Implication 4: Equity and Innovation in Low-Resource Contexts: A most motivating implication is that excellence does not require expensive technology. In contexts like Benin and across West Africa where class sizes are large and resources are limited (Dakpo, 2019, p. 34), drama and role-play offer a high-impact, zero-cost pedagogy. They leverage the most available resource: human creativity and interaction (Alabi, 2020, p. 102).

RECOMMENDATIONS

For EFL Teachers:

- Design "Pragmatic Task Cycles": each two-week unit should target one or two speech acts, structured as Awareness Raising, Task Planning, Role-Play/Drama Performance, Language Focus, and Reflection (Ellis, 2003, p. 16).
- Build a Local Scenario Bank: Create scenarios grounded in students' lived reality: negotiating with a landlord, refusing a peer, emailing a professor. Local relevance increases motivation and transfer (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 45).
- Use Video for Noticing: Record performances and use 60-second clips in post-task analysis. This makes pragmatic choices visible and discussable (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 13).
- For Curriculum Developers and Institutions
- Integrate Pragmatics into Standards: Explicitly include pragmatic descriptors in EFL syllabi and proficiency frameworks. Specify what learners should be able to _do_ socially at each level.
- Mandate Performance-Based Assessment: 30% of speaking assessment should be role-play tasks rated for both fluency and sociopragmatic appropriateness (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 45).
- Establish "Drama Labs": Convert one classroom into a flexible space with movable chairs and simple props to signal that this is a space for action, not passive reception.
- For Ministries of Education and Policymakers
- Invest in Teacher Training: Fund national workshops on "Drama for Language Teaching." Partner with theatre professionals to train EFL teachers in basic techniques (Maley & Duff, 2005, p. 3).
- Publish Open-Access Resources: Develop and distribute free teacher guides with 50 ready-to-use pragmatic drama tasks adapted for African contexts.

For Learners: Learners should be encouraged to view mistakes as "rehearsal data," not failure. Keep a "Pragmatic Portfolio" where they record new phrases learned in role and reflect on when to use them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study opens several innovative pathways

- **Longitudinal Transfer Studies:** Track learners for 12 months to determine if classroom gains in drama transfer to real-world interactions outside the university.

- **Neurocognitive Research:** Use think-aloud protocols and eye-tracking during role-play to investigate how embodiment affects the cognitive processing of politeness and face (Piazzoli, 2011, p. 56).
- **AI-Augmented Drama:** Explore how AI chatbots can serve as "always-available" role-play partners for low-stakes pragmatic practice between classes.
- **Comparative Cultural Studies:** Replicate this study in 3 different African countries to develop a pan-African framework for teaching intercultural pragmatics through drama.
- **Impact on Critical Thinking:** Examine whether perspective-taking in drama also develops learners' critical cultural awareness and empathy alongside linguistic competence.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The most extremely innovating insight of this study is simple: you cannot learn to swim by reading about water. You must get in. Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques put learners in the social water of the target language. They make pragmatics necessary, safe, and meaningful. The data show that when learners act, they learn. When they reflect, they own. When they perform, they become. For EFL education to remain relevant in the 21st century, it must embrace creativity not as decoration, but as methodology. By doing so, we will graduate not just students who know English, but graduates who can use English to build relationships, navigate difference, and lead with intercultural competence.

CONCLUSION

This study was motivated by the persistent gap between EFL learners' grammatical accuracy and their inability to use language appropriately in real social contexts. Despite years of instruction, many learners remain pragmatically "mute" - grammatically correct yet socially ineffective (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 1). This research investigated whether Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques could serve as creative catalysts to develop EFL learners' pragmatic competence. The first section introduced the problem by contrasting traditional form-focused instruction with the communicative demands of real life. It established that pragmatic competence, the ability to produce and comprehend language that is contextually appropriate (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 45), is essential for successful intercultural communication, yet is rarely taught explicitly in low-resource contexts. The second one presented a critical literature review and theoretical framework. The review showed that while pragmatics instruction improves learner performance (Taguchi, 2015, p. 15), explicit instruction alone often fails to lead to proceduralization. Drama and role-play have been identified as powerful but underutilized tools for providing embodied, contextualized practice (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9). The study was grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978, p. 86) and Pragmatic Theory (Leech, 1983, p. 11), framing role-play as a mediational space where learners co-construct meaning and negotiate social norms within a Zone of Proximal Development. The third section described a 14-week quasi-experimental, mixed-methods design. An experimental group received Task-Based Role-Play and Drama instruction, while a control group received standard communicative tasks. Data were collected through Discourse Completion Tests, role-play performances,

and reflective journals, analyzed using both quantitative and thematic methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 174). The fourth one presented the findings. Quantitatively, the experimental group showed statistically significant gains in speech acts of requests, apologies, and refusals, and in sociopragmatic appropriateness ($p < .001$). Qualitatively, learners reported increased confidence, awareness of cultural norms, and reduced anxiety in performing speech acts. The drama techniques provided what Van Ments (1999, p. 21) calls "safe rehearsal for real life." The fifth one discussed the implications, arguing that creativity is not an add-on but a core mechanism for pragmatic development. The findings confirmed that embodied, affective engagement accelerates the internalization of pragmatic norms.

Educational Overview and Practical Perspectives: The results of this study offer a transformative educational overview for EFL pedagogy. Moving beyond the textbook, Task-Based Role-Play and Drama reposition the classroom as a "laboratory of social life" (Holden, 1981, p. 1). 1. **Practical Aspect 1: From Grammar to Action.** Traditional EFL classrooms prioritize grammatical accuracy over appropriateness. This study demonstrates that role-play allows learners to practise illocutionary force and politeness strategies in context (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60). For example, learners do not just learn "Could you...?" but when, to whom, and with what tone to use it. This directly addresses Kasper and Rose's (2002, p. 1) call for instruction that bridges competence and performance.

Practical Aspect 2: Affective and Cognitive Catalyst. Drama techniques reduce the affective filter (Krashen, 1982, p. 21) by lowering anxiety and increasing motivation. When learners step into a role, mistakes become part of the character rather than personal failure. This creates the low-risk environment necessary for pragmatic experimentation, as advocated by Maley and Duff (2005, p. 3). Embodied action also enhances memory and retrieval of formulaic expressions (Taguchi, 2015, p. 15).

Practical Aspect 3: A Scalable, Low-Resource Solution. Unlike technology-heavy solutions, role-play and drama require minimal resources: a classroom, teacher facilitation, and learner imagination are sufficient. This makes it a highly relevant and equitable approach for contexts with large classes and limited materials (Alabi, 2020, p. 102). Teachers can adapt scenarios to local cultural norms, ensuring that pragmatic instruction develops intercultural competence rather than merely importing Western norms (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 45).

Motivating Recommendations and Future Directions: Based on these findings, three innovations are proposed:

- For Teachers: Integrate "Pragmatic Drama Packs" into every unit. Each pack should contain a social scenario, role cards, and reflection prompts. Teachers should be trained as directors, not just instructors (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 9).
- For Curriculum Designers: Replace isolated grammar drills with Task-Based Pragmatic Units. Assessment should include performance-based tasks that evaluate appropriateness, not just correctness (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 45).
- For Researchers: Future studies should use corpus-based analysis of learner role-play to identify developmental

patterns in pragmatic production. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine transfer to real-world interactions.

This study confirms that Task-Based Role-Play and Drama Techniques are not mere classroom activities. They are creative catalysts that transform EFL learners from passive grammar students into active, socially competent communicators. By providing a space to rehearse identity, negotiate meaning, and experience consequence-free failure, drama makes pragmatics visible, felt, and lived. As Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) argued, learning occurs through activity. In the dramatic space, language ceases to be an object of study and becomes a tool for living. The most innovative aspect of this approach is its humanity dimension: it teaches not just what to say, but who to be in another language. This is the future of EFL, creative, embodied, and pragmatically empowered.

REFERENCES

- Alabi, O. (2020). Challenges of English language teaching in West African universities. Lagos University Press.
- Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (2010). Language assessment in practice. Oxford University Press.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). Evaluating the empirical evidence: Grounds for instruction in pragmatics? In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 13–32). Cambridge University Press.
- Benson, P. (2013). Teaching and researching: Autonomy in language learning (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Dakpo, K. (2019). Oral proficiency and pedagogical constraints in Francophone African universities. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 29–47.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Holden, S. (1981). *Drama in language teaching*. Longman.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Pearson.
- Kao, S. M., & O'Neill, C. (1998). *Words into worlds: Learning a second language through process drama*. Ablex.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Blackwell.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development. Oxford University Press.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.
- Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413–468). Academic Press.
- Maley, A., & Duff, A. (2005). *Drama techniques: A resource book of communication activities for language teachers* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

- Piazzoli, E. (2011). Process drama: The use of affective space to reduce language anxiety in the additional language learning classroom. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre*, 16(4), 545–552. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2011.606942>
- Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 471–483). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Taguchi, N. (2015). *Instructed pragmatics at a glance: Where instructional studies were, are, and should be going*. *Language Teaching*, 48(1), 1–50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444814000263>
- Van Ments, M. (1999). *The effective use of role-play: Practical techniques for improving learning* (2nd ed.). Kogan Page.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
