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A Needs Analysis of Using a Pragmatics Approach in Teaching Drama in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

This study investigates the need for integrating a pragmatics approach in teaching drama within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Employing a qualitative needs analysis design, the research involved 23 sixth-semester students of the English Department selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using open-ended questionnaires structured around a needs analysis framework encompassing target needs (necessities, lacks, and wants) and learning needs. The data were analyzed through qualitative descriptive analysis to identify patterns related to students' pragmatic competence and instructional expectations.The findings reveal more specific dimensions of learners' needs. In terms of necessities, students are required to understand how meaning in drama is constructed through context, including implicature, speech acts, and sociocultural norms, in order to interpret characters' intentions and perform dialogues appropriately. However, in terms of lacks, the data indicate that many students experience difficulties in interpreting implied meanings, recognizing indirect speech acts, and adjusting language use according to social context, which results in overly literal or mechanically delivered performances. Furthermore, regarding wants, students express a strong preference for more interactive and contextualized learning activities, such as role-play, script analysis focusing on pragmatic elements, and explicit instruction on how language functions in real communicative situations.These findings suggest that drama instruction in EFL contexts requires more explicit integration of pragmatic components, not only as supplementary material but as a core aspect of learning. The study highlights the pedagogical value of pragmatics as a conceptual foundation for enhancing both communicative competence and interpretive skills in drama learning. By positioning pragmatic competence as a central learning objective, this research contributes to the development of learner-centered and contextually grounded drama pedagogy in EFL settings. The findings also provide a more concrete basis for future instructional design and empirical research on pragmatics-based drama teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent developments in language education, communicative competence is no longer viewed as limited to grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge; rather, it encompasses the ability to use language appropriately within diverse social and cultural contexts (Hamid et al., 2020; He, 2023; Muzychenko & Morozova, 2025; S. Yang & Han, 2025). This broader perspective reflects a shift from form-focused language teaching toward a more communicative and functional understanding of language use. Within this framework, learners are expected not only to construct grammatically correct sentences but also to interpret and convey meaning in ways that are sensitive to context, social relationships, and communicative purposes. Consequently, successful communication depends not merely on linguistic knowledge but also on the ability to understand how language functions in real-life interaction. This ability is widely recognized as pragmatic competence, a fundamental component of communicative competence that enables learners to navigate the subtle and often implicit dimensions of meaning in language use.

Pragmatic competence involves a range of interpretive and productive abilities, including understanding speaker intention, interpreting implied meanings, recognizing indirect speech acts, and selecting appropriate linguistic forms based on situational norms and cultural expectations. In authentic communication, speakers frequently rely on indirectness, politeness strategies, and contextual cues to convey their intended meanings. Therefore, learners must develop the capacity to interpret utterances beyond their literal meanings. Numerous studies have demonstrated that learners who possess adequate grammatical knowledge may still encounter communicative difficulties when they lack pragmatic competence. Such learners may produce grammatically correct sentences that nonetheless sound inappropriate, overly direct, or culturally insensitive in specific contexts (Anum et al., 2025; Glaser & Martínez-Flor, 2025a; Noviyenty, 2023). hese pragmatic shortcomings can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and communicative breakdowns, particularly in intercultural communication settings. As a result, pragmatics has increasingly been recognized as an essential component of effective language instruction and a critical area of focus in contemporary EFL pedagogy.

A growing body of research has highlighted the positive impact of explicit pragmatic instruction in English as a Foreign Language classrooms. Studies have shown that integrating pragmatic elements into language teaching can significantly enhance learners' ability to perform communicative functions appropriately in different contexts. For instance, Rahayu & Eripuddin (2023) found that explicit instruction on speech acts significantly improved pre-service teachers' ability to produce contextually appropriate requests, apologies, and refusals in English. Their findings suggest that when learners are guided to analyze communicative intentions and contextual factors, they become more aware of how language functions in social interaction. Similarly, Gudmestad (2022) reports that pragmatics-focused teaching helps reduce instances of pragmatic failure and increases learners' awareness of politeness strategies in cross-cultural communication. Such instruction encourages learners to reflect on the relationship between linguistic form, communicative intention, and sociocultural norms.

In contrast, studies examining language classrooms that prioritize grammatical form without incorporating pragmatic instruction reveal persistent limitations in learners' interactional competence. Learners who receive predominantly form-focused instruction often struggle to manage the pragmatic appropriateness of their utterances in real communicative situation (Basturkmen & Nguyen, 2017; Martínez Celis, 2019). While these learners may demonstrate strong command of

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grammatical structures, they frequently encounter difficulties in adjusting their language according to contextual variables such as power relations, degrees of politeness, and communicative intent. These comparative findings highlight an important gap between linguistic knowledge and actual language use, suggesting that grammatical competence alone is insufficient to ensure effective communication. Consequently, integrating pragmatic awareness into language teaching is increasingly regarded as necessary for developing learners' overall communicative competence.

Despite the growing recognition of pragmatics in language education, its application within drama pedagogy remains relatively underexplored. Drama as a pedagogical approach inherently involves interaction, role-taking, and contextualized communication, making it an ideal environment for the development of pragmatic competence. Through dramatic activities, learners engage in simulated communicative situations where they must interpret characters' intentions, respond to dialogue dynamically, and convey meaning through language, tone, and contextual cues. These characteristics make drama particularly suitable for fostering pragmatic awareness, as learners are required to consider not only what is said but also why and how it is said within a particular context.

However, existing research on drama-based language learning has primarily emphasized its affective and performance-related benefits rather than its pragmatic dimensions. Many studies highlight how drama activities can increase learners' motivation, improve pronunciation, enhance fluency, and build self-confidence in speaking English. While these outcomes are valuable, they often overlook the deeper interpretive processes involved in understanding and performing dramatic dialogue. Wu & Sun (2024) argue that learners frequently approach dramatic texts in a mechanical manner, focusing mainly on memorizing lines or reproducing dialogue without fully comprehending the pragmatic functions of the utterances. For example, learners may fail to recognize whether a particular line functions as a request, a warning, a threat, or an attempt at persuasion. As a result, their performances may lack authenticity and communicative depth, as the pragmatic intentions underlying the dialogue are not fully understood.

This situation indicates a potential mismatch between the inherently communicative nature of drama and the instructional approaches commonly employed in drama classrooms. Ideally, drama should serve as a rich pedagogical resource for exploring speech acts, implicatures, politeness strategies, and other pragmatic phenomena embedded in authentic discourse. Through the analysis and performance of dramatic texts, learners can develop a deeper understanding of how language operates within complex social interactions. However, without a clear pedagogical framework that explicitly incorporates pragmatic principles, these opportunities may remain largely underutilized. Consequently, the integration of pragmatics into drama instruction represents an important yet insufficiently addressed area within EFL pedagogy.

A comparison of existing research in pragmatics and drama-based language learning therefore reveals a significant pedagogical gap. On the one hand, studies in pragmatics consistently emphasize the importance of contextualized language use for achieving communicative success. On the other hand, drama pedagogy—despite its potential to provide authentic communicative practice—has not systematically incorporated pragmatic theory into its instructional design. This gap is particularly noteworthy because drama offers a unique environment in which learners can actively experiment with language functions, interpret characters' communicative intentions, and negotiate meaning through performance. When learners engage in dramatic activities, they are required to interpret contextual cues, adapt their language to different roles, and convey emotions and intentions effectively, all of which are central aspects of pragmatic competence.

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Given this potential, the absence of a pragmatics-oriented perspective in drama teaching represents a missed opportunity for enhancing learners' communicative development. Incorporating pragmatic awareness into drama instruction could help learners move beyond superficial performance toward a deeper understanding of how language functions within social interaction. Such an approach would enable learners to analyze dialogue not only in terms of vocabulary and grammar but also in terms of communicative purpose, interpersonal relationships, and cultural norms.

Therefore, this study aims to conduct a needs analysis of a pragmatics approach in teaching drama within an EFL context. Specifically, the research seeks to identify learners' pragmatic needs, examine the extent to which current drama teaching practices address pragmatic competence, and explore students' expectations regarding the integration of pragmatic elements in drama learning. By synthesizing insights from previous studies in pragmatics and drama pedagogy, this research intends to provide a clearer understanding of the pedagogical requirements for incorporating pragmatics into drama instruction. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and pedagogically to the development of more meaningful, learner-centered, and context-sensitive drama teaching practices that support the advancement of learners' communicative competence in EFL settings.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative needs analysis design to investigate the necessity of integrating a pragmatics approach in teaching drama within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Needs analysis is widely used in language education research to systematically identify learners' requirements, learning gaps, and expectations in relation to specific instructional contexts. By examining what learners need to know and be able to do in communicative situations, needs analysis enables researchers to design more relevant and effective pedagogical approaches. In the context of drama learning, where communication relies heavily on interaction, interpretation, and contextual meaning, a needs analysis approach provides a valuable framework for exploring learners' pragmatic competence and identifying areas that require instructional support.

Specifically, this study employed a needs analysis framework that distinguishes between target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to the competencies learners require in order to function effectively in the target learning context, while learning needs relate to the processes and conditions that support learners in acquiring those competencies. This framework is particularly suitable for identifying pragmatic gaps in drama learning because pragmatic competence involves not only knowledge of linguistic forms but also the ability to interpret communicative intentions, implied meanings, and sociocultural norms embedded in dialogue. By examining students' necessities, lacks, and wants, the needs analysis approach allows the researcher to identify specific areas in which learners struggle with pragmatic interpretation and to understand their expectations regarding the integration of pragmatics in drama instruction.

The population of this study consisted of students of the English Department. The sample included 23 sixth-semester students, selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was used to ensure that participants had relevant learning experience and were able to provide informed insights related to the research focus. Sixth-semester students were chosen because they had already taken drama-related courses and had sufficient academic exposure to English language learning, including literature and performance-based activities. Their experience in performing and interpreting dramatic texts enabled them to reflect critically on the challenges they encounter in understanding pragmatic meanings within dramatic dialogue. Consequently, these participants were

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considered appropriate sources of information for identifying the pragmatic needs associated with drama learning.

Instrumentation

The primary research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire developed based on the needs analysis framework consisting of target needs and learning needs. The questionnaire was designed using open-ended questions in order to allow participants to express their opinions, experiences, and expectations in their own words. Open-ended questions were selected because they provide richer qualitative data and enable the researcher to explore students' perspectives in greater depth. Through this format, participants could describe the difficulties they encounter when interpreting drama dialogue, explain the types of support they require, and suggest preferred instructional approaches for developing pragmatic competence in drama learning.

The target needs section of the questionnaire aimed to identify what students need to be able to do in drama learning contexts. This section consisted of three components: necessities, lacks, and wants.

- The necessities component explored the pragmatic competencies required in drama learning, such as understanding speech acts, interpreting implied meanings, recognizing politeness strategies, and using context-appropriate language in dramatic dialogue. These competencies are essential for enabling students to interpret characters' intentions and perform dialogues in a communicatively meaningful way.
- The lacks component examined students' difficulties and gaps in pragmatic understanding when interpreting or performing drama texts, including challenges in recognizing indirect meanings or identifying the communicative function of specific utterances.
- The wants component investigated students' expectations and perceived needs regarding the integration of pragmatic instruction in drama teaching, including the types of support and instructional focus they believe would improve their understanding of dramatic dialogue.

The learning needs section of the questionnaire focused on how students prefer to learn pragmatics in drama classes. This section explored students' preferred learning activities, instructional strategies, and classroom interactions that could support the development of pragmatic competence. In particular, the questionnaire asked participants to describe learning activities that they considered helpful for understanding pragmatic aspects of dialogue, such as role-play, script analysis, contextual discussion, and reflective performance tasks. By examining these preferences, the study aimed to identify instructional approaches that align with learners' expectations and learning styles. The information gathered from this section provides important insights for designing pedagogical strategies that integrate pragmatic awareness into drama instruction in a way that is both effective and meaningful for learners.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted after determining the research population, sample, and research instrument. The questionnaire, which was designed based on a needs analysis framework encompassing target needs and learning needs, was distributed to 23 sixth-semester students of the English Department. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the researcher explained the purpose and objectives of the study to the participants to ensure that they clearly understood the nature of the research and their role in it. The students were then invited to respond to the questionnaire honestly based on their experiences in learning drama and their perceptions of pragmatic language use in dramatic dialogue.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended ques**tions** that allowed participants to elaborate on their perceptions, difficulties, and expectations regarding the integration of pragmatics in teaching

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drama. This format was selected in order to obtain rich and descriptive qualitative data that could capture students' authentic experiences and perspectives. Unlike closed-ended questions, open-ended responses enabled participants to express their ideas freely and provide more detailed explanations about the challenges they encounter in understanding pragmatic aspects of dramatic texts. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire to ensure that their responses were thoughtful and reflective. After completion, all questionnaires were collected and organized systematically for further analysis.

In conducting the data collection process, ethical considerations were carefully observed. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage without any negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that all responses would be treated with strict confidentiality, and the identities of the participants would remain anonymous in all stages of data reporting and publication. The data collected were used solely for academic research purposes and were handled responsibly to maintain the privacy and integrity of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis to systematically interpret students' responses and identify patterns related to their pragmatic needs in drama learning. The analysis followed a structured and iterative process grounded in thematic coding. First, all responses were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. This initial stage allowed the researcher to become immersed in the data and to identify preliminary ideas relevant to pragmatic competence and drama learning.

Second, the data were coded using a thematic coding strategy, in which meaningful units of data—such as key phrases, sentences, and recurring ideas—were identified and labeled. These initial codes focused on aspects related to pragmatic competence (e.g., understanding speech acts, interpreting implied meanings), students' experiences in drama learning, and their perceived instructional needs. The coding process was conducted systematically across all responses to ensure consistency. After initial coding, similar codes were grouped into broader categories and themes, which were aligned with the needs analysis framework.

Third, the coded data were organized into the main categories of target needs and learning needs. Target needs were further classified into necessities, lacks, and wants, while learning needs encompassed students' preferred learning strategies, classroom activities, and forms of instructional support. This categorization enabled the researcher to clearly identify the areas in which students require pragmatic competence, the difficulties they experience, and their expectations for improving drama instruction. The data were then interpreted to identify recurring patterns, dominant themes, and significant relationships across participants' responses.

Finally, the findings were synthesized to draw conclusions regarding the extent to which a pragmatics approach is needed in teaching drama and how such an approach could address the identified learner needs. Representative excerpts from participants' responses were selected to support the interpretation and to illustrate key themes emerging from the data.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, several strategies were employed. Credibility was ensured through careful and repeated data checking, including revisiting the original responses during the coding and interpretation process to confirm the accuracy of the identified themes. This process helped minimize misinterpretation and ensured that the findings genuinely reflected participants' perspectives. In addition, dependability was maintained by applying a consistent coding procedure and clearly documenting each stage of the analysis process. This systematic approach allows the analysis to be transparent and replicable, thereby strengthening the reliability of the study.

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Overall, these procedures ensured that the findings provide a valid and trustworthy basis for pedagogical recommendations.

FINDINGS

The results of this study are presented based on the needs analysis framework, which consists of target needs and learning needs. The findings were derived from qualitative analysis of questionnaire responses provided by 23 sixth-semester students of the English Department. The analysis revealed several recurring patterns across participants' responses regarding the role of pragmatic competence in drama learning. Overall, the findings indicate that students recognize the importance of pragmatic understanding in interpreting dramatic dialogue but also experience significant challenges in applying pragmatic knowledge during performance. These patterns are discussed below in terms of target needs and learning needs.

Target Needs

The analysis of target needs revealed three major components: necessities, lacks, and wants, each reflecting different dimensions of students' pragmatic needs in drama learning. Regarding necessities, most participants emphasized that pragmatic competence is essential for understanding and performing dramatic dialogue effectively. Students indicated that drama requires not only linguistic comprehension but also the ability to interpret communicative intentions embedded in dialogue. In particular, respondents highlighted the importance of understanding speech acts, such as requests, commands, and apologies, in order to interpret characters' intentions accurately. They also noted that dramatic texts frequently contain indirect expressions and implied meanings, which require contextual interpretation rather than literal translation.

Several students also stressed the importance of recognizing politeness strategies and social relationships between characters, as these factors influence how dialogue should be delivered in performance. One participant stated:

> *"Sometimes the dialogue in drama does not directly show what the character means. We need to understand the situation and the relationship between characters to perform it correctly*." (Participant 7)

Another respondent similarly noted:

> *"Understanding the intention behind the dialogue helps us express emotions and meaning better when acting."* (Participant 12)

These responses demonstrate a shared perception among students that pragmatic competence is necessary for interpreting character intentions, managing tone and expression, and delivering dialogue appropriately during performance. This pattern suggests that drama learning inherently requires contextualized language understanding beyond grammatical knowledge. Despite recognizing the importance of pragmatic competence, the findings revealed several gaps in students' abilities, categorized as lacks. Many participants reported difficulties in interpreting the communicative purpose of dialogue and applying pragmatic knowledge during drama performance. A common issue reported by students was the tendency to memorize lines without fully understanding their pragmatic functions.

One student explained:

> *"Usually we memorize the script first, but sometimes we don't really understand why the character says something in that way." (Participant 3)*

Other respondents reported challenges in identifying implied meanings, tone, and speaker intentions within dramatic dialogue. For example:

> *"It is sometimes difficult to know if the dialogue is a request, sarcasm, or anger because it depends on context.*" (Participant 15)

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These responses indicate a clear gap between students' linguistic knowledge and pragmatic interpretation skills. While students may understand the vocabulary and grammar of a script, they often struggle to interpret how meaning is shaped by context, character relationships, and communicative intentions. This pattern suggests that drama learning currently places more emphasis on performance or memorization rather than on deeper analysis of pragmatic meaning. In relation to wants, students expressed a strong desire for more explicit instruction on pragmatic aspects of language use in drama classes. Many participants expected lecturers to provide explanations about the communicative functions of dialogue before asking students to perform dramatic scenes. Students also wanted more guidance in understanding how context, social status, and interpersonal relationships influence language use in drama.

For instance, one participant commented:

"*Before acting, it would be helpful if the lecturer explains the intention of the dialogue and how the character should speak.*" (Participant 9)

Another student suggested:

"*We need more discussion about the meaning behind the dialogue, not only memorizing the lines*." (Participant 18)

These responses indicate that students are aware of their limitations in pragmatic understanding and expect instructional support to help them interpret dramatic texts more effectively. The pattern suggests that learners view pragmatic instruction as a valuable component that could enhance both comprehension and performance in drama learning.

Learning Needs

The findings related to learning needs reveal students' preferences regarding instructional strategies and learning environments that support the development of pragmatic competence. A strong pattern emerging from the data is students' preference for interactive and contextual learning activities rather than passive or memorization-based approaches. Most participants indicated that role-play and drama performance activities are effective methods for understanding pragmatic meaning, particularly when accompanied by explanation and discussion. One participant stated:

"Role-play helps us understand how the dialogue should sound in real situations." (Participant 5)

Students also favored script analysis activities, especially those focusing on character intention, context, and communicative function. Through such activities, learners believed they could better understand why characters speak in particular ways and how dialogue should be interpreted during performance. In addition, participants expressed a preference for learning materials that reflect real-life or culturally relevant contexts, as these materials help them relate the dialogue to authentic communication situations. Reflective performance tasks—such as peer feedback sessions and post-performance discussions were also considered beneficial for improving pragmatic awareness. As one student noted:

"*Discussing the performance after acting helps us understand if the dialogue was delivered appropriately*." (Participant 21)

These responses highlight a consistent pattern in which students prefer learning environments that encourage active engagement, contextual interpretation, and collaborative reflection. Such activities enable learners to negotiate meaning, interpret communicative intentions, and apply pragmatic knowledge in practice.

To summarize the key patterns identified in the analysis, the main findings are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1 Summary of Students' Pragmatic Needs in Drama Learning

Category	Key Finding
Necessities	Students need to understand speech acts, implied meanings, politeness strategies, and character relationships to interpret and perform dramatic dialogue effectively.
Lacks	Students experience difficulties in interpreting implied meanings, recognizing communicative intentions, and applying pragmatic knowledge during drama performance.
Wants	Students expect explicit instruction on pragmatic aspects of dialogue, including explanation of communicative functions and contextual language use.
Learning Needs	Students prefer interactive learning activities such as role-play, script analysis, contextual discussion, and reflective performance tasks to develop pragmatic competence.

Overall, the findings reveal a consistent pattern: while students recognize the importance of pragmatic competence in drama learning, they experience significant challenges in interpreting and applying pragmatic meaning in dramatic dialogue. At the same time, they express a strong preference for instructional approaches that explicitly integrate pragmatic analysis with interactive performance-based learning activities.

DISCUSSION

The results of this needs analysis confirm that pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in drama pedagogy, particularly in enabling students to interpret the communicative intentions embedded in dramatic dialogue. Participants in this study consistently emphasized that understanding dramatic texts requires more than lexical or grammatical comprehension; rather, it involves the ability to interpret contextual meaning, indirect expressions, and interpersonal relationships between characters. This finding suggests that drama learning inherently requires pragmatic awareness because dramatic discourse often relies on implied meanings, emotional nuance, and socially embedded language use. In performance contexts, learners must understand not only the literal meaning of dialogue but also the communicative purpose behind each utterance and how it reflects characters' intentions and relationships. These interpretive processes align with the broader concept of pragmatic competence in language education, which emphasizes the ability to understand language as social action within specific communicative contexts. In this sense, drama provides a natural environment for practicing pragmatic interpretation, as students must actively engage with contextual cues and communicative intentions during performance.

The findings of this study also resonate with previous research emphasizing the importance of pragmatics in English as a Foreign Language instruction. Studies on pragmatic instruction have consistently shown that learners who are trained to analyze speech acts, conversational implicature, and politeness strategies demonstrate stronger communicative performance and greater interpretive accuracy in interaction (Febriana & Fajariah, 2018; López-Serrano, 2025; Mahardhika Bella Citra A. et al., 2018; Revita et al., 2025; Yalew et al., 2025; L. Yang, 2017). These studies suggest that pragmatic knowledge enables learners to interpret social meaning beyond the literal level of text, thereby allowing them to respond more appropriately in communicative situations. The responses obtained in the present study reflect a similar pattern, as students reported that understanding the intention behind dialogue helped them perform dramatic scenes more meaningfully and convincingly. At the same time, the findings also highlight an important pedagogical gap. Many participants indicated that they rarely receive systematic instruction on how to analyze implied meanings,

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contextual language use, or interpersonal dynamics within drama texts. This observation corresponds with earlier research indicating that pragmatic elements are often insufficiently addressed in language learning materials and classroom practices Nahak et al. (2020) and Tri Budiasih (2018) As a result, learners may develop strong linguistic knowledge but still lack the interpretive skills necessary to understand how language functions within socially situated discourse.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that students often rely heavily on memorization when performing dramatic dialogue, which suggests that existing instructional practices may emphasize textual reproduction rather than communicative interpretation. This tendency reflects a broader issue in EFL pedagogy where instructional focus remains centered on linguistic form rather than on the pragmatic and contextual dimensions of language use. Previous studies have documented similar barriers to pragmatic development, noting that limited attention to contextually embedded language use can restrict learners' ability to interpret communicative intentions and adapt their language appropriately in interaction (Glaser & Martínez-Flor, 2025a; Kirner-Ludwig & Fadhil Alsaedi , 2021; Noviyenty, 2023). Within drama learning, this limitation can reduce performance activities to mechanical recitation of dialogue, preventing learners from fully engaging with the communicative meaning of the text. The results of the present study therefore suggest that drama pedagogy has not yet fully utilized its potential as a platform for developing pragmatic competence, despite its inherently communicative nature.

Contemporary research on instructional (Abraham, 2018; Baños et al., 2019; Celik, 2019; Eripuddin et al., 2022, 2024; Rahimipour, 2020; Wu & Sun, 2024)trategies also supports the students' expressed preferences for interactive, reflection-based activities. Role-play, script analysis, and contextual discussion have been shown to foster pragmatic awareness when combined with explicit scaffolding. The analysis of students' learning needs further provides valuable insights into the types of instructional strategies that may support the development of pragmatic competence in drama learning. Participants expressed a clear preference for interactive and reflective learning activities, such as role-play, script analysis, and contextual discussion. These activities were perceived as particularly effective because they allow students to explore how language functions within specific communicative contexts rather than focusing solely on memorizing dialogue. This preference aligns with pedagogical research emphasizing the importance of communicative and task-based learning environments for developing pragmatic awareness. Instructional approaches that combine explicit explanation with experiential learning activities have been shown to significantly enhance learners' ability to interpret speech acts, contextual meaning, and interpersonal relationships in communication (Basturkmen & Nguyen, 2017; Glaser & Martínez-Flor, 2025b; Noviyenty, 2023). In addition, several studies highlight that meaningful interaction and contextualized practice play a crucial role in enabling learners to negotiate meaning and interpret language use within authentic communicative situations. Research on task-based learning and translanguaging practices, for instance, demonstrates that learners develop stronger pragmatic awareness when they engage in collaborative dialogue, reflective discussion, and interactional problem-solving (Betti & Hasan, 2020; Kholidi et al., 2022; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021; Rahmadani, 2020). These findings correspond closely with the learning preferences expressed by participants in this study, who indicated that reflective discussion and contextual analysis of drama scripts helped them better understand character intentions and communicative meaning. Collectively, these insights underscore the importance of pedagogical designs that move beyond rote performance toward active interpretation and negotiation of meaning**,** a shift that students in this study clearly identified as necessary for improving their understanding of dramatic dialogue.

Taken together, these findings suggest that integrating pragmatic analysis into drama instruction could significantly enhance both the interpretive and communicative dimensions of drama learning. By encouraging students to examine dialogue in terms of speech acts, contextual meaning,

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and interpersonal relationships, educators can transform drama activities from simple performance tasks into meaningful opportunities for developing pragmatic competence. Such an approach would enable learners not only to perform dramatic texts more authentically but also to deepen their awareness of how language functions within complex social interactions.

The intersection of pragmatics and performance-based language learning has recently attracted increasing scholarly attention, suggesting that drama environments can offer particularly productive contexts for the development of pragmatic competence when instructional practices are intentionally structured. Drama inherently involves the enactment of communicative situations in which language functions as social action rather than as isolated linguistic forms. Within such performance contexts, learners must interpret dialogue in relation to social roles, interpersonal relationships, and emotional intentions. Recent work by Lee and Lee (2025) and Huang et al. (2024) demonstrates that performance-based language activities require learners to attend closely to communicative intentions, affective meaning, and relational dynamics between characters. These elements are central to pragmatic competence because they require learners to move beyond literal interpretation toward an understanding of how meaning is negotiated within specific social contexts. The findings of the present study reflect similar challenges, as students reported difficulty interpreting implied intentions and social status cues embedded in drama texts. Such difficulties indicate that learners may understand the linguistic content of dialogue while still struggling to recognize the underlying pragmatic meaning that shapes how dialogue should be interpreted and performed. This suggests that drama learning requires explicit attention to pragmatic analysis in order to support learners in interpreting communicative intent within dramatic discourse.

Furthermore, research on multimodal pragmatics highlights that pragmatic meaning in performance contexts is constructed not only through spoken language but also through a combination of verbal and nonverbal semiotic resources. In dramatic interaction, gestures, facial expressions, body movement, and prosody frequently convey critical information about speaker intention, emotional stance, and interpersonal relationships. Scholars studying multimodal communication have emphasized that these nonverbal cues are often essential for interpreting pragmatic meaning, particularly in contexts where language is embedded within social interaction (Bühler, 2024; Martinez & Lim, 2025; O'Hara, 2023). From this perspective, drama pedagogy offers a unique opportunity for learners to develop pragmatic competence because it requires them to integrate linguistic and paralinguistic elements in the construction of meaning. The difficulties reported by participants in interpreting tone and implied intention suggest that learners may not yet possess sufficient awareness of how these multimodal cues function in pragmatic interpretation. Therefore, incorporating explicit instruction on multimodal communication—such as intonation, gesture, and emotional expression—could enhance students' ability to interpret and perform dramatic dialogue more authentically.

Another dimension that emerged from the analysis concerns the role of cultural and contextual awareness in pragmatic interpretation. Research within intercultural pragmatics and global English studies has shown that pragmatic norms vary across cultures, influencing how politeness, authority, and interpersonal relationships are expressed through language (Taguchi et al., 2024; Kecskes & Zhang, 2023; Cogo, 2025). In multilingual classrooms, learners often encounter discourse that reflects cultural assumptions and communicative conventions that may differ from those in their own linguistic backgrounds. This issue was also reflected in the findings of the present study, where several students reported difficulty interpreting dialogue containing implicit cultural references. Such difficulties highlight the importance of cultural contextualization in drama instruction, as dramatic texts frequently portray social hierarchies, cultural expectations, and interpersonal dynamics that are embedded within specific cultural frameworks. Without explicit discussion of these contextual factors, learners may struggle to fully understand the pragmatic meaning of dialogue or to perform it appropriately within a dramatic context.

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Relatedly, research on pragmatic transfer and pragmatic failure provides further insight into the challenges encountered by students in this study. Pragmatic transfer occurs when learners apply communicative norms from their first language when using a second language, which may lead to unintended interpretations or inappropriate expressions. Studies in EFL contexts have demonstrated that such transfer can result in pragmatic failure, where interlocutors misinterpret communicative intentions or perceive language use as socially inappropriate (Sakurai, 2024; Al-Yousefi, 2025; Li & Chen, 2024). The difficulties reported by participants in interpreting implied meaning and contextual cues reflect similar challenges. When learners lack awareness of the pragmatic conventions underlying dramatic dialogue, they may struggle to recognize sarcasm, politeness strategies, or indirect speech acts embedded in the text. Consequently, their performances may fail to convey the intended interpersonal meaning of the dialogue. Addressing these issues requires instructional approaches that explicitly guide learners in analyzing the cultural and contextual dimensions of language use in drama.

The students' expressed desire for greater instructional guidance on pragmatic functions also provides important insights into the pedagogical implications of the findings. Participants emphasized the need for lecturers to explain the communicative purposes of dialogue and to guide them in interpreting character intentions before performance activities. This expectation aligns with research suggesting that pragmatic competence does not always develop naturally through exposure alone but often requires explicit pedagogical intervention. Scholars such as Taguchi and Roever (2024), Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2023), and Martínez-Flor et al. (2024) argue that explicit instruction can significantly enhance learners' ability to analyze contextual cues, sociocultural norms, and speaker intentions. Such instruction enables learners to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward deeper interpretive understanding of discourse. The findings of this study therefore support the view that pragmatic awareness should be deliberately integrated into language teaching practices, particularly in learning contexts—such as drama courses—where communicative interpretation plays a central role.

Beyond pragmatic theory, the findings also intersect with research on learner engagement and autonomy, which emphasizes the importance of active participation in the learning process. Studies in language education have shown that when learners engage in interactive activities that require reflection, collaboration, and negotiation of meaning, they develop greater awareness of how language functions within communication (Riley & Walker, 2024; Mercer & Kostoulas, 2023; Little, 2025). The learning preferences expressed by participants in this study—particularly their interest in role-play, script analysis, and reflective discussion—reflect this emphasis on active meaning construction. These activities encourage learners to interpret dialogue critically, evaluate communicative intentions, and reflect on how language choices influence interpersonal meaning within dramatic interaction. In this sense, drama pedagogy can support both pragmatic development and learner autonomy by creating learning environments where students actively participate in the interpretation and construction of meaning.

Taken together, the findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of integrating pragmatic instruction within performance-based language learning environments. Drama provides a particularly rich context for such integration because it naturally combines linguistic expression, social interaction, and multimodal communication. However, the results suggest that this potential is not always fully realized in classroom practice, as students often lack structured opportunities to analyze pragmatic features within dramatic dialogue. By explicitly incorporating pragmatic analysis into drama instruction—through activities such as contextual discussion, speech act analysis, and reflective performance—educators can transform drama learning from a process of memorizing scripts into a more meaningful exploration of communicative interaction.

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Overall, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in EFL pedagogy by situating pragmatic development within the context of drama-based learning. By identifying students' pragmatic needs, learning preferences, and interpretive challenges, the study provides insights that can inform the design of instructional models integrating pragmatics and performance pedagogy. Such integration has the potential to enhance both communicative competence and interpretive ability, enabling learners to understand language not only as a system of forms but also as a dynamic resource for expressing meaning within complex social interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the pedagogical significance of incorporating a pragmatics-based approach into drama instruction within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Drama presents language as a form of social action, where meaning emerges through context, intention, and interaction rather than isolated linguistic forms. Unlike traditional language exercises that often prioritize grammar and pronunciation, drama requires learners to interpret dialogue in relation to character relationships, situational factors, and emotional nuances. Furthermore, without explicit attention to pragmatics, drama activities may become overly mechanical, focusing on memorization rather than meaningful communication. Therefore, a pragmatics-oriented framework helps ensure that learners align their language use with contextual appropriateness, enabling more authentic and socially grounded communication.

This study adopts a needs analysis perspective to position pragmatic competence as a key objective in drama pedagogy. The findings show that students recognize the importance of understanding speech acts, implied meanings, and interpersonal dynamics. However, they still face challenges when applying this knowledge during performance. Moreover, drama classrooms provide effective environments for developing pragmatics because they engage learners in socially situated discourse. Consequently, the integration of pragmatic awareness into drama activities equips learners to interpret intentions, manage relationships, and convey meaning beyond literal expressions. In this way, pragmatics functions as a bridge that connects linguistic knowledge with performance and enhances both communicative competence and the authenticity of dramatic expression.

Finally, the study offers practical and theoretical implications for educators, curriculum designers, and future research. Lecturers are encouraged to embed explicit pragmatic analysis into drama instruction through activities such as speech act exploration, contextual script analysis, reflective role-play, and discussion of verbal and nonverbal communication. In addition, at the curricular level, integrating pragmatic objectives into drama or speaking courses can ensure that learners systematically develop context-sensitive communication skills. Moreover, further research is needed to investigate the impact of pragmatics-based instructional models in drama settings through experimental or longitudinal designs. Ultimately, such efforts will support the development of evidence-based practices that strengthen drama as a meaningful and context-rich approach to enhancing communicative competence in EFL education.

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