

THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PRAGMATICS IN EFL CLASSROOM: WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO GRADE 10 STUDENTS OF AGAZI SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to investigate the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in English Language classroom with particular reference to grade 10 students of Agazi Secondary School. Descriptive method was employed to investigate what actually happens in the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in English Language classroom. The participants of the study were 150 grade 10 students selected using simple random sampling technique and all the six English Language teachers teaching in grade 10 selected using comprehensive sampling techniques. Questionnaire, interview, classroom observation and textbook analysis were used to collect the data. The results were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Key terms: Authentic Materials, Practice, Pragmatic Awareness, Pragmatics, Social Context

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Sileshi (2007), English Language has a great place in commerce, education, communication, politics, and technology of the world as well as the continent. It plays a great role in different institutions and organizations of Ethiopia. It is also a working language of banks,

insurances and many international organizations. Moreover, it is a medium of instruction in high schools and higher institutions. Hence, it is worthy for learners to have deep awareness about the English language, especially the linguistic knowledge so that they can be effective in their communication and understanding of meaning. Linguistics is a broad field which encompasses phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Aronoff & Rees-Miller, 2003). Claim that although many linguists have already made a lot of investigations on the branches of linguistics such as phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax, their investigation towards semantics and pragmatics has been a recent phenomenon.

Horn and Ward (2004) stated that one of the most important advances in linguistics was made gradually during the 1960s when it was realized that there were two fundamentally different types of linguistic meanings. The one type of meaning is intrinsic to the linguistic form containing it, and the second type of meaning is the result of the interaction between linguistic form of an utterance and the context (Horn & Ward, 2004). According to Horn and Ward, the first type belongs to semantics while the second is to pragmatics.

Hence, Horn and Ward (2004) and other linguists suggested that the proliferation of studies on pragmatics have been realized recently, especially since 1960s. In other words, following the appearance of the term 'pragmatics' in Morris's (1938) 'Theory of Signs', a number of influential theories of pragmatics were born in the field. Austin's (1962) speech act theory, Searle's (1969) taxonomy of speech acts and the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts, Grice's (1975) cooperative principles and conversational implicature, Leech's (1983) politeness principles and Levinson's (1983) conversational implicature have contributed a lot towards the development of pragmatics by focusing on its various elements. It was therefore, since then that several linguists have given emphasis to pragmatics by differentiating it from the related field, that is, semantics.

However, the teaching of pragmatics in EFL context might be challengeable since the EFL learners often get the opportunity to practice in the actual classroom but not outside it. In addition, there could

be many other factors that hinder the practice of pragmatics in EFL classroom. Thus, textbooks should create a good opportunity for the EFL learners so as to learn pragmatics successfully. Nevertheless, Vellenga (2004) still argues that textbooks are not well designed to provide learners with sufficient pragmatic features due to the de-contextualized and limited meta pragmatic explanations they have. Therefore, this study mainly focused on investigating the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in EFL classroom by considering its practice, the techniques used, its role and the challenges that teachers and students faced.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Although pragmatics is a recent phenomenon, it is attracting the attention of scholars. “Based mainly on proposals by three philosophers – Austin, Grice and Searle – pragmatics has come into existence over the past 40 years and is still actively under development” (Griffiths, 2006, p. 132). In a similar way, Taguchi (2015) suggests a number of researches have been conducted for over three decades focusing on how pragmatics can be taught. As a result, it has been revealed that teaching pragmatics is significant for EFL learners as pragmatic competence enhances communicative competence. For instance, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Tylor (2003) said, teaching pragmatics paves the way for appropriate communication by enhancing communicative competence. In a similar way, Taguchi (2013) claimed knowing pragmatics enables learners to be competent speakers in another language. What is implied is that the knowledge of pragmatics facilitates the appropriate usage of a given language.

The existence of cultural differences is also another challenge a speaker and a listener may face in the practice of pragmatics. For instance, ideas about the appropriate language to mark politeness differ substantially from one culture to the next. If you have grown up in a culture that has directness as a valued way of showing solidarity, and you use direct speech acts (Give me that chair!) to people whose culture is more oriented to indirectness and avoiding direct imposition, then you will be

considered impolite (Yule, 2006). Hence, not knowing the culture of the given context may lead to unnecessary difference and confrontation.

Lack of knowledge about implicatures is also another challenge in the practicality of pragmatics. Implicatures are deductions that are not made strictly on the basis of the context expressed in the discourse, but they are made in accordance with the conversational maxims taking into account both the linguistic meaning of the utterance as well as the particular circumstances in which the utterance is made (Fromkin et al., 2011, p. 174). For instance, 'I have never slept with your wife!' is to mean 'I have slept with your wife!' which can be understood if knowledge of implicatures is taken into account. This implies that the practice of teaching pragmatics in EFL classroom becomes hard unless the learners have awareness on implicatures and how to use them.

The researcher has realized that adequate research has not been conducted yet, especially in the Ethiopian context in spite of the fact that pragmatics has a significant role in EFL classroom. This is, therefore, a critical issue which needs a great emphasis and further research. The practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in EFL classroom may be low or high which should be investigated as it has not been studied so far. Moreover, the researcher wanted to investigate the perception of teachers and students in the role of pragmatics in EFL classroom and the possible challenges in its practice. What makes this study unique was that it focused on filling the research gap on the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics, perceptions of students and teachers in the role of pragmatics and the possible challenges they come across. That was why the researcher intended to conduct a study on investigating the practice of teaching and learning of pragmatics in EFL classroom with particular reference to grade 10 students of Agazi Secondary School.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to investigate the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in EFL classroom with particular reference to grade 10 students of Agazi Secondary School.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

This study has the following specific objectives that are emanated from the general objective:

1. To investigate the teaching of pragmatics in EFL classroom.
2. To determine teachers' and students' perception in the role of pragmatics in EFL classroom.
3. To identify the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of pragmatics in EFL classroom.
4. To analyze the extent of grade 10 student textbook in providing pragmatic information for EFL learners.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study can have multidimensional advantages. Above all, teachers can benefit from this study. As the study focuses on pragmatics, which is a recent phenomenon that needs further research, teachers can enhance their knowledge of pragmatics by taking the findings of this study into consideration. Hence, the researcher believes that this study is significant for teachers of EFL classroom. In addition to this, students of the study area can benefit a lot from this study. Moreover, this study is significant for curriculum designers. The study provides adequate findings on the practice of teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom. Hence, curriculum designers can consider the findings when they design curriculum for the EFL classroom.

1.5. Limitation of the Study

Researches seldom become free from limitations. The current study is believed to have certain limitations. Primarily, it is worth keeping in mind that the sample size of the study was limited to only six EFL teachers and 150 grade 10 students. Probably, this often creates danger to make generalization on the study. Therefore, it would have been better and more effective if a good number of schools and participants were included in the study to gather sufficient information to obtain better result.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The main aim of the study is to investigate the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in EFL classroom. Hence, descriptive research method was employed for the study. The researcher decided to employ this method because the research described pragmatics in a detailed manner by investigating how it is practiced in the EFL classroom. In other words, it objectively described the practice of teaching pragmatics by conducting an investigation upon the teachers and students of the study area. Furthermore, a detailed investigation on grade 10 student textbook was conducted. Therefore, descriptive research method was used in relation to the problem of the study. Mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) was also used in order to analyze the collected data.

2.2. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

There were 445 grade 10 students at the school. There were 10 sections of grade 10 students. From the 445 students, 75 male and 75 female students were selected as samples for the study. Lottery method, which is simple random sampling technique, was employed to select the participants. As there were 10 sections, fifteen students were selected from each section. Therefore 150 students were chosen as sample for the study.

However, non-probability sampling technique has been employed for the teachers. As there were only 6 EFL teachers who have been teaching grade 10 at the school, all of them were taken as participants of the study. Comprehensive sampling technique was therefore, employed for the teachers. Thus, the total sample size of the study was 156, and both probability sampling and non-probability sampling techniques have been employed.

2.3. Data Gathering Tools

Primary sources of data were collected through questionnaire, interview and classroom observation. In addition to the primary sources of data, textbook analysis was used as a secondary source of data to collect the intended data. All the four data collection tools have been employed because they were important for collecting adequate data and triangulating so that the validity of the data collection could be ensured.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the data collection, the researcher has informed both the teachers and the students of Agazi Secondary School about the purpose of the study. They have been clearly informed that their participation in the study was important for the successful accomplishment of the study. Moreover, they were informed that their responses would be used only for the purpose of the study. Following this, questionnaires have been distributed for pilot study to 30 grade 10 students of Finotebirhan Secondary School in Adigrat by asking permission and informing the purpose of the study to the school administration, and they have been analyzed and modified carefully before administering to the participants of the study.

After that, the questionnaires have been distributed to the 150 participants of the study and collected for analysis. After the collection of the questionnaires, the semi-structured interview was conducted with the 6 EFL teachers. The classroom observation and the document analysis were also conducted

with a great attention. Finally, all the data collected through the data collection tools were made ready for the data analysis.

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

The raw data collected through the data collection tools (questionnaires, interview, classroom observation and document analysis) have been analyzed in accordance to their appropriate methods of analysis. According to the nature of the data collection tools to be used in the study, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were applied. Thus, the data collected through the closed-ended part of the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. In other words, all the data collected using closed-ended items of the questionnaire were entered into SPSS so that appropriate descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) can be generated and reliability of the obtained numerical data could be ensured.

Hence, quantitative data analysis method was used to analyze the data. On the other hand, the data collected through the open-ended items of the questionnaire, interview, observation and document analysis were analyzed using qualitative data analysis method. Therefore, the raw data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis in order to reach valid conclusion and appropriate recommendations.

3. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

3.1. The Teaching of Pragmatics at Agazi Secondary School

Regarding the teaching of pragmatics at Agazi Secondary School, major focus was made on the degree of practice of teaching pragmatics and the techniques teachers use to teach pragmatics. Questionnaire for grade 10 students, interview for EFL teachers and classroom observation were employed as instruments. Hence, the findings of the three instruments were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.1.1. The Degree of Practice of Teaching Pragmatics

In order to investigate the degree of practice of pragmatics in EFL classroom of grade 10 students at Agazi Secondary School, questionnaire, interview and classroom observation were employed as instruments. The findings of the questionnaire were presented in table with statistical analysis as follows.

Table 1: The degree of practice of teaching pragmatics in EFL class room

No	Items	Responses in	Alternatives					Mean	S.Deviation
			V. High	High	I don't know	Low	V. Low		
1	Expressing apology	Fr	11	24	5	68	42	2.29	1.24
		%	7.3	16	3.3	45.3	28		
2	Expressing forgiveness	Fr	8	19	3	76	44	2.14	1.13
		%	5.3	12.7	2	50.7	29.3		
3	Expressing compliments	Fr	22	33	8	55	32	2.72	1.40
		%	14.7	22	5.3	36.7	21.3		
4	Expressing agreements and disagreements	Fr	22	44	2	48	34	2.81	1.44
		%	14.7	29.3	1.3	32	22.7		
5	Expressing opinions	Fr	28	37	5	40	40	2.82	1.52
		%	18.7	24.7	3.3	26.7	26.7		
6	Expressing refusals	Fr	13	21	9	41	66	2.16	1.35
		%	8.7	14	6	27.3	44		
7	Using deixis	Fr	23	30	7	37	53	2.55	1.51
		%	15.3	20	4.7	24.7	35.3		
8	Using anaphora	Fr	15	22	8	44	61	2.24	1.38
		%	10	14.7	5.3	29.3	40.7		
9	Using inferences	Fr	5	11	31	34	69	1.99	1.12
		%	3.3	7.3	20.7	22.7	46		
10	Practicing presupposition	Fr	4	14	34	40	58	2.10	1.10
		%	2.7	9.3	22.7	26.7	38.7		

NB: fr = frequency, V. High = Very High, V. Low = Very Low, S. Deviation = Standard Deviation

According to item 1 of table 1, 11(7.3%) and 24(16%) of the respondents revealed that the degree of practice of expressing apology was 'very high' and 'high' respectively. However, 68(45.3%) and 42(28%) of them indicated that the degree of practice of expressing apology was 'low' and 'very low' respectively, and the rest 5(3.3) replied that they did not know whether expressing apology was

practiced or not. The mean score of this item ($\bar{x} = 2.29$) was below the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$) which indicated that the degree of practice in teaching apology inclined towards 'low' and 'very low'. In other words, teachers did not teach expressing apology to the intended degree with little variation among the respondents ($SD=1.24$). This implied that apologizing was not given emphasis in spite of being an important kind of communicative acts.

Based on item 2, only 8(5.3%) and 19(12.7%) of the respondents responded that the degree of practice of expressing forgiveness was 'very high' and 'high' respectively. Despite this, 76(50.7%) and 44(29.3%) of the respondents replied that the degree of practice of expressing forgiveness was 'low' and 'very low' respectively. The remaining 3(2%) of the respondents, however, said that they did not realize whether teachers taught expressing forgiveness or not. The mean score of this item ($\bar{x} = 2.14$) was below the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$). This mean score clearly indicated that the degree of practice of expressing forgiveness was highly limited. Even the standard deviation ($SD=1.44$) illustrated that the variation among the respondents was low.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to what extent the EFL teachers practice pragmatics in EFL classroom through expressing agreement and disagreement. Item 4 depicted that 22(14.7%) and 44(29.3%) of the respondents said the degree of practice of expressing agreement and disagreement as 'very high' and 'high'. In contrast, 48(32%) and 34(22.7%) of them reported the degree of practice of expressing agreement and disagreement as 'low' and 'very low', and 2(1.3%) of them said 'I do not know'. The mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.81$) which was above the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$) indicated that expressing agreement and disagreement was practicable in the EFL classroom with a low variation among the respondents ($SD=1.44$).

Item 5 was about the practice of expressing opinions. With regard to it, 28(18.7%) and 37(24.7%) of the respondents confirmed that the practice of expressing opinions in EFL classroom was 'very high'

and 'high' respectively. However, the same 40(26.7%) of the respondents agreed that the practice of expressing opinions in the EFL classroom was 'low' and 'very low'. There were also 5(3.3%) of the respondents who were not sure whether expressing opinions was practiced in the EFL classroom or not. The mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.82$) which was above the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$) indicated that the practice of expressing opinion was available in the EFL classroom with a little variation among respondents ($SD=1.52$). The implication was that expressing opinion was among the communicative acts which were practiced in the actual classroom.

Item 6 asked to what extent expressing refusals was practiced in the EFL classroom. According to the item, 13(8.7%), 21(14%) and 9(6%) of the respondents responded that the practice of expressing refusals was 'very high', 'high' and 'I do not know'. On the other hand, 41(27.3%) and 66(44%) of them revealed that the practice of expressing refusals was 'low' and 'very low'. The mean score of this item ($\bar{x} = 2.16$) was below the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$) which indicated that the degree of practice of expressing refusals inclined towards 'low' and 'very low' with a low variation among the respondents ($SD=1.35$). What could be concluded from the findings was that the practice of teaching refusals was highly restricted in spite of being an important element in the teaching of pragmatics in EFL classroom.

Table1 further showed that only 5(3.3%) and 11(7.3%) of the respondents responded 'very high' and 'high' with regard to the practice of using inferences in the EFL classroom. In contrast, 34(22.7%) and 69(46%) of them said 'low' and 'very low,' and the rest 31(20.7%) of them claimed they did not know whether the use of inferences was practiced or not. The mean score of this item ($\bar{x} = 1.99$) was below the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$) with a low variation among the respondents ($SD=1.12$). This score clearly revealed that the degree of practice of using inferences was very limited. What could be deduced from the findings was that although inference is an important element in the practice of

teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom, it was not adequately practiced which hampered the development of pragmatic knowledge.

As it is shown in table 1, 4(2.7%) and 14(9.3%) of the respondents reported the use of presupposition in the actual classroom as 'very high' and 'high' respectively. However, 40(26.7%) and 58(38.7%) of them argued as 'low' and 'very low' respectively, and the remaining 34(22.7%) of them replied 'I do not know'. The mean score of this item ($\bar{x} = 2.10$) was below the average mean ($\bar{x} = 2.30$) which indicated that the degree of practice in using anaphora inclined towards 'low' and 'very low' with a little variation among the respondents ($SD=1.10$). Hence, it could be inferred that the practice of presupposition was ignored despite its importance in the teaching of pragmatics in EFL classroom.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to investigate the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in EFL classroom with particular reference to grade 10 students at Agazi Secondary School. In line with this, the study focused on examining the degree of practice of teaching pragmatics in EFL classroom, determining the perception of students and teachers on the role of pragmatics in EFL classroom, identifying the challenges they face in the practice of teaching pragmatics and analyzing the existence of the student textbook in providing pragmatic information for learners of EFL.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, 150 grade 10 students were taken as a sample using simple random sampling technique. Besides, all the six EFL teachers were taken for the study using comprehensive sampling technique as they were few in number. The school and the grade level were selected purposely because the researcher was familiar with them, and no similar study has ever been conducted in the area. Questionnaires were distributed to the 150 sample students, and semi-structured interview was conducted with the six EFL teachers. In addition to this, classroom observation was conducted on all the EFL teachers using the prepared checklist. Furthermore,

textbook analysis was conducted focusing on the grade 10th textbook. Hence, the data collected through questionnaire, interview, classroom observation and textbook analysis were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, and the findings were summarized as follows.

Although the teaching of pragmatics in EFL classroom can be ensured through the practice of various speech acts such as greetings, introductions, parting, apologizing, forgiving, wishing, suggesting, complimenting, requesting, advising, inviting and regretting, the findings of the questionnaire showed that some of the speech acts were not practiced well. Forgiving, refusing, greetings, introductions, parting, presupposition and inference were among the highly ignored ones in the practice of teaching pragmatics. The findings of the interview and the classroom observation also substantiated the findings of the questionnaire. Therefore, the findings justified that the practice of teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom was very low because the EFL teachers were giving little emphasis for it.

Regarding the techniques the EFL teachers used to teach pragmatics in EFL classroom, pair and group discussion, translations and presentations were commonly stated. Besides, storytelling, drills and role-plays were used to some extent. However, some techniques such as explicit instruction of pragmatics, drama and games were used by the EFL teachers to a highly limited extent. The findings of the questionnaire, the interview and the classroom observation clearly revealed that the EFL teachers did not bring in authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, videos and audios to support the contents of the textbook in the teaching of pragmatics in the actual classroom. Hence, the findings illustrated that the EFL teachers were ignoring some techniques despite their importance for teaching pragmatics in EFL classroom.

Furthermore, the findings obtained from the students and the EFL teachers indicated that pragmatics plays an important role in EFL classroom. The findings showed that pragmatic knowledge is significant for enhancing communicative competence, understanding idiomatic expressions,

communicating with native speakers, understanding foreign cultures, speaking appropriately in English in different contexts and fostering international communication. Hence, the perception of students and teachers towards the role of pragmatics in EFL classroom was found out to be positive.

Moreover, the findings depicted that the EFL teachers encountered various challenges in the practice of teaching pragmatics in the EFL classroom. Even though various challenges were stated, large class size, lack of teachers' determination, lack of students' interest, limited knowledge of target culture/language, lack of authentic materials and poor language level of students were highly rated challenges. Thus, it was revealed that the EFL teachers were not teaching pragmatics effectively due to the various challenges they encountered.

The findings of the questionnaire, the interview and the textbook analysis further showed that the students' textbook tried to include some expressions in its contents which could help the EFL learners develop their pragmatic knowledge. However, they were limited as apologizing, expressing opinion, agreeing and disagreeing, suggesting, advising opinions, wishing, congratulating, inviting and expressing sympathy are the only contents provided on the textbook that could provide opportunity for the practice of pragmatics in the EFL classroom. Even the available pragmatic contents have lack of Meta pragmatic explanations and appropriate situations. In general, the degree of the student textbook in providing pragmatic information for learners of EFL is highly limited which resulted in having difficulty in the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics in the EFL classroom.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite its importance in language teaching, pragmatics was not given emphasis by the EFL teachers in the actual classroom. The EFL teachers were therefore, ineffective in the practice of teaching pragmatics in EFL classroom. Moreover, it was deduced that only some techniques such as pair and group discussion, translations and presentations were used to teach pragmatics in EFL with little

emphasis on important techniques like games, drama and bringing in authentic materials from outside. Therefore, it was concluded that the practice of teaching and learning pragmatics was low some important techniques were neglected.

Furthermore, the findings of the study led to a conclusion that the grade 10 teachers and students at Agazi Secondary School perceive pragmatics as an essential component in EFL teaching and learning. In spite of being a recent phenomenon, pragmatics is vital in EFL classroom by enhancing communicative competence, facilitating the understanding of other cultures, fostering the understanding of idiomatic expressions and encouraging the using of language in its appropriate context. What could be concluded from the findings was that both students and teachers had a positive perception on pragmatics regarding the multi-dimensional roles it has in EFL classroom.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings illustrated that the teaching and learning of pragmatics in EFL classroom was ineffective as it was highly limited. Hence, the EFL teachers should have awareness towards pragmatics, and they should understand the value it has in EFL classroom so that they can practice it effectively in the actual classroom. The EFL teachers are therefore, advised to explicitly teach pragmatic features of language and make use of authentic models of language to help learners practice using appropriate language in social contexts. In addition to this, the EFL learners have to get trainings and workshops on how to teach pragmatics using various techniques like role-plays, games, situations and drama.

Large class size and lack of authentic materials were among the challenges the EFL teachers faced in the teaching of pragmatics in EFL classroom according to the conclusion drawn. The number of students has to be minimized in collaboration with the school administration in order that the EFL teachers can teach the pragmatic features by giving opportunity for all the learners. Besides, the EFL

teachers need to bring in authentic materials from outside in order to teach the socially acceptable language in the actual classroom.

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