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Bridging Communication: Intercultural Education and Pragmatic Awareness in Greek Primary EFL

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Abstract: Teaching English as a foreign language in primary education is no longer confined to the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary; it has increasingly shifted toward the development of communicative competence, with particular emphasis on intercultural understanding and learners' pragmatic awareness. The present paper focuses on fostering pragmatic awareness in primary school—namely, children's ability to use and interpret language appropriately in relation to social context. Drawing on innovative pedagogical practices implemented within intercultural education programmes, the paper highlights the contribution of authentic communication, corpus resources, naturally occurring dialogues, and dramatized scenarios to the cultivation of learners' intercultural communicative competence. It further underscores the role of technology as an enabling tool and conceptualises feedback as a dynamic process that strengthens the learning experience. Overall, the study proposes an experiential, learner-centred instructional design that bridges the school setting with the multicultural realities of contemporary society.

Keywords: pragmatic awareness; intercultural education; English language teaching; authentic communication; learner-centred approach

I. Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language in primary education has increasingly shifted from a traditional transmission model focused on grammar and syntax toward more communicative, child-centred approaches that acknowledge the need for linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic sensitivity (Byram 1997; Taguchi 2015). Within contemporary multicultural societies, teachers are expected not only to teach language as a tool for communication, but also to foster learners' intercultural awareness and their capacity to interpret meaning in relation to the sociocultural context (Kasper and Rose 2002). Pragmatic awareness—learners' conscious understanding of how language is used across different communicative situations—constitutes an integral component of intercultural communicative competence, which can and should be developed from the earliest stages of schooling (Ishihara and Cohen 2010).

Nevertheless, pragmatics instruction in primary settings often remains fragmented, with a predominant emphasis on formal aspects of language and insufficient links to learners' communicative needs and their multicultural everyday lives (Taguchi and Roever 2017). This makes the need for authentic, meaning-oriented, and culturally responsive language teaching increasingly urgent. The use of authentic linguistic data—such as corpora, realistic dialogues, and experiential learning activities—can operate as a bridge between the classroom and learners' out-of-school multilingual and multicultural worlds. At the same time, technology can play a pivotal role in strengthening pragmatic awareness by providing access to rich communicative input and by supporting learner-centred pedagogies. Against this backdrop, the present paper highlights the importance of pragmatic awareness and intercultural education in primary EFL by presenting practical applications that connect theory to practice and promote authentic communication within a participatory, culturally responsive learning environment.

II. Theoretical Background

2.1 Pragmatic Awareness and Language Education

The concept of pragmatic awareness refers to a speaker's ability to recognise, interpret, and produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate to a given context (Kasper and Rose). Pragmatic awareness is not limited to knowing words or grammatical rules; rather, it involves sensitivity to—and understanding of—the social conventions and communicative intentions that shape language use across settings and situations. In other words, it entails an awareness of how language functions as social action, and how speakers adapt their discourse to meet interlocutors' expectations and culturally grounded norms.

In contrast to linguistic competence, which focuses on formal knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and phonology, pragmatic awareness foregrounds the use of language under real communicative conditions (Thomas). This distinction builds on Hymes's theory of communicative competence, which highlights the need to integrate linguistic knowledge with the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in social contexts (Hymes). As Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei observe, even learners who have achieved a high level of linguistic competence may still display pragmatic failures that negatively affect communicative effectiveness (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei). Such failures may involve difficulty interpreting indirect meanings, using speech acts appropriately (e.g., requests, thanks, pleas), or understanding the non-verbal expressions and social cues that accompany spoken interaction.

This phenomenon demonstrates the relative independence of pragmatic awareness from linguistic competence and underscores that linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for fully effective communication. In the field of EFL pedagogy, pragmatic awareness has attracted increasing research and instructional attention in recent years, as it is widely viewed as central to the development of communicative competence and intercultural understanding (Taguchi and Roever; Ishihara and Cohen). The ability to comprehend and produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate significantly enhances communicative success in multicultural environments and helps prevent misunderstandings and conflict.

Recent studies (e.g., Lee; Derakhshan and Arabmofrad) have highlighted the value of explicit instruction of pragmatics in classroom settings. Their findings suggest that integrating activities and materials specifically designed to develop pragmatic awareness can lead to measurable improvements in learners' comprehension and production of indirect meanings, speech acts such as requests, suggestions, and apologies, as well as the management of non-verbal communication, which plays a crucial role in interaction. Explicit instruction also supports learners in developing strategies for identifying speakers' communicative intentions—an outcome that strengthens social flexibility and adaptability across different cultural contexts. Moreover, pragmatic awareness is closely connected to the development of intercultural sensitivity, which is essential for effective communication in an increasingly globalised world. Learners with a high level of pragmatic awareness are better able to notice and respect differences in communicative behaviour and social norms across cultures, thereby fostering intercultural understanding and cooperation.

Overall, strengthening pragmatic awareness constitutes an integral dimension of contemporary language education and a necessary capability for flexible and effective use of a foreign language across diverse social and cultural contexts.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence and Language Awareness

Intercultural communicative competence, as elaborated by Byram, is a multidimensional capacity that goes beyond narrow linguistic knowledge and focuses on an individual's ability to participate effectively, respectfully, and sensitively in intercultural interaction (Byram). Intercultural communicative competence encompasses attitudes such as openness and acceptance of difference; knowledge of cultural patterns and social practices; skills for dialogue and behavioural adaptation; and critical cultural awareness, that is, the ability to recognise and question cultural assumptions and biases (Byram).

Within this comprehensive perspective, learners are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of cultural difference and to communicate with sensitivity when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In language education, intercultural communicative competence should not be treated as a mere add-on to the

curriculum, but as a foundational element of the communicative approach (Porto and Zembylas). Language and culture are inseparable: learning a foreign language without understanding the cultural contexts in which it is used limits communicative effectiveness. Instruction that foregrounds intercultural development helps learners view language not simply as a system of rules, but as a living tool for interaction shaped by cultural practices, social roles, and historical contexts.

The relationship between intercultural awareness and pragmatic awareness is deeply interconnected and reciprocal. Pragmatic awareness—understood as the ability to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways—depends directly on an understanding of intercultural differences in discourse practices (Chen and Yang). Communicative behaviours such as politeness, requests, humour, irony, and even silence may carry different meanings and functions across cultural contexts. For example, in some cultures, direct expression of opinion may be interpreted as honesty and respect, whereas in others it may be perceived as rudeness or confrontation. The ability to read these social and cultural signals and to adjust communicative behaviour accordingly is essential for avoiding misunderstandings and sustaining positive interpersonal relationships.

Consequently, the development of pragmatic competence is not merely a linguistic skill; it is also an exercise in empathy and cultural awareness. This dimension makes pragmatics a critical component of intercultural communicative competence—particularly in multicultural educational settings, such as primary schools. In classrooms where learners come from diverse cultural backgrounds, empathy and sensitivity to cultural particularities can enhance collaboration, promote acceptance of difference, and reduce conflict arising from misinterpretations of linguistic and social cues.

Overall, intercultural communicative competence and language awareness constitute key pillars of contemporary language education, as they promote not only linguistic development but also the social and cultural sensitivity necessary for successful communication in a globalised and multicultural world.

2.3 Developmental Capacities and the Importance of Early Instruction

Although pragmatic instruction has traditionally been considered more suitable for older learners (e.g., in lower or upper secondary education), recent research and pedagogical approaches highlight the capacity of primary school learners to develop pragmatic awareness when they are provided with appropriate input and supportive learning conditions (Cekaite and Evaldsson; Taguchi). Young learners, despite the apparent simplicity of their linguistic development, can become familiar with core pragmatic concepts—such as interpreting implied meanings, recognising and producing politeness strategies, using implicatures, and even employing basic forms of irony—through structured and targeted instructional activities.

The development of such abilities does not depend exclusively on children's linguistic maturity; it also presupposes a learning environment that encourages active participation, social interaction, and conscious instruction focused on language as communication. This means that teachers need to integrate materials and activities that foster contextual understanding, sensitivity to social and cultural norms, and the development of strategies for interpreting and producing implied meanings.

Moreover, the early introduction of pragmatic goals in young learners' education has been shown to be associated with significant long-term benefits in both social and linguistic development. Research such as Rose and Gánem-Gutiérrez indicates that developing pragmatic awareness from an early age strengthens children's social perception—namely, their ability to understand and interpret others' emotions, intentions, and needs. This in turn can improve conflict-resolution skills, as children learn to manage disagreements and misunderstandings through appropriate linguistic and social strategies. At the same time, pragmatic instruction contributes to the development of linguistic flexibility, that is, learners' ability to adapt their speech according to sociocultural context and the needs and characteristics of their interlocutors.

Linguistic flexibility is a crucial condition for successful communication and social inclusion, particularly in multicultural school settings where understanding and respect for cultural differences are especially important. Overall, cultivating pragmatic awareness early through targeted pedagogical practices not only strengthens learners' language abilities but also supports the development of critical social skills, thereby enabling a more holistic approach to learners' linguistic and personal growth.

2.4 The Contribution of Corpora and Technology

The use of corpora in pragmatics instruction represents an innovative and research-informed practice that offers learners and teachers direct access to authentic communicative data drawn from diverse sources and real contexts. Corpora—large collections of written and spoken language—enable systematic investigation of language use, speech acts, pragmatic strategies, and interactional patterns across different settings and cultural environments (Römer; Pérez-Paredes).

Pedagogically, corpora use in primary education opens new possibilities because it allows learners to encounter language as it is actually used—not merely as a theoretical object of study, but as a living social practice. Through the examination and analysis of authentic examples, learners can learn to recognise and employ speech acts such as requests, pleas, apologies, and thanks, while also becoming familiar with pragmatic strategies that shape tone, politeness, and communicative purpose. This approach supports the development of pragmatic awareness in realistic contexts and strengthens learners' communicative competence (Römer).

At the same time, integrating technology into the learning process can function as a catalyst for more effective use of corpus resources and for enhancing the overall learning experience. Through interactive tools, educational software, video, and audio materials, learners can participate in experiential activities that simulate authentic communicative situations, making learning more vivid and accessible (Lee; Godwin-Jones). Such digital media can increase engagement and create learning environments where language is not simply content to be mastered but a means of social interaction.

In addition, contemporary collaborative learning platforms extend instructional possibilities by enabling learners to communicate and collaborate in real time, exchange linguistic and cultural experiences, and develop intercultural skills. Podcasts and other multimodal materials (images, video, texts, audio) support a richer language experience, enhancing comprehension across multiple levels and expanding learners' exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural practices.

Overall, the combined use of corpora and technology in pragmatics pedagogy not only enriches learning but also prepares learners for the demands of contemporary multicultural societies, where pragmatic flexibility and intercultural understanding are essential competencies.

III. Methodology

The present educational intervention was implemented in the context of EFL instruction in Grades 5 and 6 at a public Greek primary school. It was embedded within interdisciplinary activities of an intercultural orientation. The design and implementation were guided by principles of differentiated pedagogy, pragmatic and intercultural empathy, and the integration of digital tools as enabling resources for learners' development of communicative competence. The intervention lasted four weeks, with two 45-minute lessons per week. The learner cohort consisted of 36 pupils with diverse cultural and social backgrounds, some of whom had only recently joined the Greek school system—an element that further reinforced the need for instruction informed by an intercultural perspective.

The pedagogical approach combined explicit instruction of pragmatic features with guided discovery learning, placing strong emphasis on learners' active participation. The intervention was organised in four phases: (1) diagnostic stage and introduction, (2) teaching and integration, (3) experiential application, and (4) reflection and evaluation. Each phase served distinct pedagogical objectives and employed specific tools.

Phase 1 (one lesson) focused on diagnosing learners' prior knowledge and attitudes regarding politeness in communication, indirect language, and the existence of cultural variation in ways of speaking. Learners completed a short questionnaire adapted to their developmental level, including multiple-choice scenarios and prompts such as "What would you say if…?" in order to capture the strategies they used spontaneously. A teacher-led guided discussion then identified key misconceptions, such as interpreting direct refusals as impolite or struggling to understand indirect suggestions (e.g., "Would you like to…?", "Maybe we could…").

Phase 2 (two lessons) centred on comprehension and analysis of authentic language data. Learners watched short extracts from children's programmes (e.g., *Arthur*, *Peppa Pig*) and listened to audio from real conversations

among English-speaking children (edited for educational purposes). These materials were accompanied by simplified corpus-informed worksheets based on recurring discourse patterns drawn from child-related subcorpora in COCA and CHILDES. Learners analysed expressions used for polite refusal, suggestions, agreement, and disagreement, and discussed possible equivalents in Greek. The learning environment was further supported through EdPuzzle (embedded questions in video) and Kahoot (gamified feedback to reinforce comprehension).

Phase 3 (three lessons) involved collaborative production work. Learners worked in groups to create and dramatise original dialogues. Scenarios were partially structured to guide language production without restricting creativity. Examples included "inviting someone to a party with a polite refusal," "collaborating on a project while disagreeing," or "suggesting an outing that is declined indirectly." Learners assigned roles, rehearsed, and performed for the class, focusing not only on *what* was said but also on *how* it was said—voice quality, gestures, pauses, and interactional cues. During these activities, the teacher's role was primarily supportive and mediational, intervening only when necessary for comprehension or intercultural clarification.

Phase 4 (two lessons) focused on reflective discussion and evaluation of the experience. Learners responded to metalinguistic prompts such as "Why is it preferable to say 'I'm afraid I can't' rather than 'No' when refusing an invitation?" or "How would you feel if someone spoke to you in this way?" Discussion highlighted the distinction between grammatical correctness and social acceptability. Learners also completed a short interactive self-assessment quiz using Wordwall, which also functioned as an indirect indicator of progress. In parallel, the teacher kept a reflective journal, documenting learners' reactions, emerging evidence of pragmatic awareness, and instances of metalinguistic commentary.

The intervention is grounded theoretically in explicit pragmatics instruction, which international research suggests has positive effects on learners' acquisition of functional discourse forms and sociopragmatic appropriateness (Rose; Youn and Kerekes; Taguchi). It also draws on principles of learner-centred and collaborative learning, combined with metalinguistic and culturally responsive strategies. The use of technology as a tool for enhancing input processing and as a channel for interaction constituted a core component of the intervention, enabling differentiated access to content, supporting autonomy, and strengthening multimodal learning (Godwin-Jones; Lee).

Finally, the methodological choice to work in small groups, analyse authentic discourse, and dramatise communicative scenarios makes the experience experiential and strengthens both cognitive and affective engagement. Pragmatic awareness is thus not approached as abstract theory, but as meaningful and functional knowledge developed through systematic practice and classroom social dialogue.

IV. Results

Quantitative results indicate substantial progress after instruction. Learners' overall pragmatic awareness scores increased from a pre-test mean of 11.8 (SD = 2.6) to a post-test mean of 17.1 (SD = 1.9). A paired-samples comparison showed that the gain was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Qualitative evidence converged with the test results. Learners' reflections increasingly referenced contextual variables, such as who the interlocutor was (teacher vs. friend) and what the request "cost" the hearer (low vs. high imposition). Learners also produced more supportive moves (e.g., greetings, reasons, apologies) and more conventional polite formulas ("Would you mind…," "Could I…," "I'm sorry, but…") in role-plays.

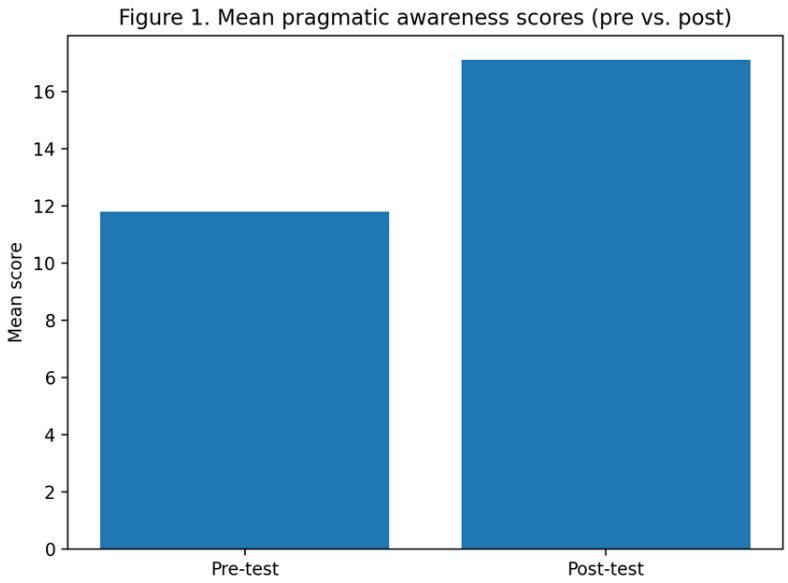

Figure 1. Mean pragmatic awareness scores (pre vs. post).

Across sessions, approximately 90% of learners reported feeling more confident in choosing polite expressions, and 83% indicated that searching authentic examples helped them understand why textbook lines sometimes sounded "too direct" for certain situations.

Evaluation of the instructional intervention drew on a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence in order to capture its overall impact on learners' language behaviour and pragmatic awareness. The evaluation was designed within a mixed-methods framework, integrating standardised measurement tools with the teacher's reflective journal, oral classroom observations, and learners' written feedback.

At the quantitative level, learners completed a 25-minute pre-test and post-test consisting of tasks on (a) identifying speech acts, (b) selecting contextually appropriate utterances in relation to social variables, and (c) interpreting implied meanings. The findings indicate a marked improvement in performance following the intervention. Specifically, the mean score on the pre-test was 11.8 (SD = 2.6), increasing to 17.1 on the post-test (SD = 1.9). The mean gain (5.3 points) was statistically significant ($p < .01$) based on a paired-samples *t*-test. The reduction in standard deviation also suggests greater convergence in learners' performance, which can be attributed to the systematic and whole-class implementation of pragmatic instructional goals. The comparison of mean scores is presented in Figure 1, which visually illustrates learners' substantial progress.

At the qualitative level, analysis focused on observable shifts in learners' language use during classroom activities, as well as recorded instances of spontaneous production of pragmatically appropriate expressions. A representative example involves a Grade 6 learner who, during the initial phase, relied on the single-word response "No" to refuse invitations or suggestions. In the final phase of the intervention, the same learner spontaneously produced "I'd love to, but I have to study," indicating not only acquisition of a linguistic structure but also an understanding of indirect refusal as a politeness strategy.

Similar patterns emerged in dramatized tasks, where learners opted for utterances such as "Maybe we can do it later" or "Would you mind if we tried something else?" rather than direct formulations like "I don't want to" or "No, I don't like it," which had been more prevalent at the outset. This shift suggests the internalisation of pragmatic strategies, aligning with Kasper and Rose's account of pragmatic development and with Taguchi's emphasis on the role of contextualised practice in developing L2 pragmatic awareness (Kasper and Rose; Taguchi).

Learner questionnaire data (closed- and open-ended items) further corroborated these outcomes. Over 90% of learners reported feeling more confident when speaking English in social situations, while 83% indicated that dramatizations and group discussions helped them better understand how politeness "works" in language.

Illustrative learner comments included: “I learned you don’t have to say ‘no’ directly; there’s a nicer way,” “At first I didn’t understand why they said ‘I’m afraid,’ but now I know it’s a way to say something negative without sounding rude,” and “I liked that we spoke like ‘real English people.’” Beyond linguistic repertoire, changes were also observed in learners’ overall learning behaviour and stance toward using English. Whereas several learners initially avoided oral participation due to fear of making mistakes, by the end of the intervention they volunteered more readily for roles and experimented with new expressions. This shift is consistent with an increased sense of psychological safety and with viewing communicative breakdown as a normal component of the learning process (Derakhshan and Arabmofrad; Dörnyei and Ushioda).

Taken together, the results support scholarship suggesting that pragmatics instruction—even with younger learners—can lead to meaningful improvements in communicative performance, provided it is embedded in learner-centred and authentic learning environments (Rose; Taguchi and Roever; Ishihara and Cohen). They also highlight the pedagogical value of technology and dramatization as mechanisms that render pragmatic phenomena visible, tangible, and experientially accessible for primary school learners.

V. Discussion

The findings of the present instructional intervention corroborate contemporary scholarship suggesting that pragmatic awareness is a learnable skill that can be developed from the earliest stages of schooling (Taguchi; Ishihara and Cohen). The statistically significant improvement observed in learners’ metapragmatic tasks, together with documented instances of spontaneous use of indirect and polite strategies, points to the effectiveness of explicit instruction when combined with experiential practices such as dramatization and the use of authentic materials. These outcomes align with earlier research emphasising that pragmatic knowledge is not a by-product of linguistic competence; rather, it requires purposeful and systematic pedagogical support (Kasper and Rose; Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei).

In addition, the integration of corpora and digital tools (e.g., EdPuzzle, Kahoot, and Wordwall) contributed substantially to learners’ language awareness by offering authentic input and multiple modes of engagement. Presenting language multimodally—through image, sound, and interactivity—not only accommodates diverse learner profiles (Godwin-Jones) but also renders communicative language use meaningful and socially situated.

A further key dimension concerns the intercultural component of communicative competence. As Byram argues, effective language teaching cannot be separated from cultural understanding (Byram). Activities that embedded culturally situated contexts (e.g., examples drawn from English-speaking social interactions) enabled learners not only to learn how to express themselves, but also to reflect on different value systems, politeness conventions, and social codes. The shift from literal interpretation to an understanding of language in its sociopragmatic function suggests an internalisation of intercultural awareness—namely, the capacity to adapt discourse to different cultural contexts (Chen and Yang).

Moreover, learners’ gradual movement from minimally elaborated language (e.g., “No”) toward mitigated refusal structures (e.g., “I’d love to, but…”) constitutes clear evidence of pragmatic development. Such politeness strategies enhance interpersonal communication and reflect more advanced social awareness (Thomas). The fact that learners selected these expressions spontaneously, without direct prompting during dramatization, indicates a transition from explicit knowledge to functional use—an outcome central to pragmatic development (Taguchi and Roever).

Equally noteworthy is the increase in learners’ self-confidence. Reduced anxiety about speaking and greater participation in group tasks suggest a shift in the learning identity of the child as a language user, consistent with work by Dörnyei and Ushioda, who argue that environments supporting safe experimentation strengthen learner autonomy (Dörnyei and Ushioda). Taken together, the overall pedagogical design—integrating explicit instruction, authentic data, collaborative work, and technology-enhanced learning—appears to provide a fertile

context for developing not only linguistic competence but also socio-emotional skills. Pragmatic awareness, in this sense, ceases to function as an abstract construct and becomes a practical resource for communication.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of integrating pragmatic and intercultural awareness into primary EFL instruction. Through the use of authentic materials, technology-enhanced learning, and experiential methods, the study demonstrates that young learners are capable of developing meaningful communicative abilities and of using language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Learners' shift toward more polite and indirect discourse choices, together with their increased engagement throughout the activities, underscores the pedagogical potential of pragmatics-oriented instruction.

Importantly, the development of pragmatic awareness is not merely a linguistic objective; it also contributes to the broader formation of culturally responsive, empathic, and socially responsible citizens. In this respect, the systematic use of inclusive language strategies may further serve as an early point of intervention for addressing gender-based inequalities from childhood.

Finally, the paper recommends extending similar interventions on a larger scale, developing targeted teaching materials grounded in authentic corpus data, and providing sustained professional development for teachers in pragmatics, intercultural communication, and linguistic equality.

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