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DESIGNING A SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATIVE TASKS THAT SERVES TO DEVELOP COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN FUTURE ENGLISH TEACHERS

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical foundations and pedagogical dimensions of cognitive-pragmatic competence in pre-service English language teacher education. Drawing on frameworks in cognitive linguistics, interlanguage pragmatics, and task-based language teaching, the study proposes a principled system of communicative tasks designed to develop future teachers' ability to interpret and produce language in contextually and socially appropriate ways. The findings confirm that cognitive-pragmatic competence is systematically teachable through explicit consciousness-raising activities, inferential reasoning tasks, and professionally oriented communicative scenarios. The proposed task system is argued to offer a valuable contribution to pre-service teacher education curricula and methodological practice.

Keywords: cognitive-pragmatic competence, communicative tasks, pre-service English language teachers.

Introduction

The preparation of future English language teachers has increasingly shifted focus from purely linguistic knowledge toward the development of multidimensional professional competencies. Among these, cognitive-pragmatic competence – the ability to interpret and produce language in alignment with communicative intent, social context, and discourse structure – stands as a critical yet underexplored dimension of teacher education. Current pre-service English teacher training programs frequently prioritize grammatical and lexical proficiency while giving insufficient attention to pragmatic awareness and the cognitive mechanisms underlying authentic communication. This imbalance creates a gap between theoretical language knowledge and the practical communicative skills that effective teaching demands. Communicative tasks, as a well-established instrument of task-based language teaching, offer promising potential for addressing this gap. However, their systematic application toward the specific goal of cognitive-pragmatic competence development in pre-service teacher education remains insufficiently studied and methodologically underdeveloped.

Literature Review

The theoretical basis of cognitive-pragmatic competence is rooted in the evolution of communicative competence models. Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence through grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic components [1], while Bachman (1990) expanded this framework by positioning pragmatic competence — encompassing illocutionary and sociolinguistic sub-competencies — as a core element of language ability [2]. The cognitive dimension draws on Langacker's (1987) cognitive grammar, which frames meaning-making as a dynamic mental process rather than a static linguistic form, demonstrating that language comprehension is fundamentally cognitive in nature [3].

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Despite this theoretical richness, pragmatic competence remains insufficiently addressed in pre-service teacher education. Kasper and Rose (2002) argue that many EFL teachers lack formal pragmatic training and tend to prioritize structural accuracy over communicative appropriateness [4]. Task-based language teaching offers a suitable methodological response: Ellis (2003) demonstrates that communicative tasks activate higher-order cognitive processes and, through structured pre-task, during-task, and post-task phases, create systematic conditions for progressive pragmatic competence development in language learners and future teachers alike [5].

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical design combining systematic literature review and pedagogical modeling. Drawing on theoretical frameworks in cognitive linguistics, interlanguage pragmatics, and task-based language teaching, a system of communicative tasks was designed targeting cognitive-pragmatic competence development in pre-service English language teachers. The proposed task system was evaluated through expert review by university-level teacher educators, whose feedback informed its refinement.

Results And Discussion

The analysis yielded four key findings regarding cognitive-pragmatic competence development in pre-service English language teachers. First, the study confirms that cognitive-pragmatic competence integrates illocutionary awareness with sociolinguistic sensitivity to contextual and cultural norms. A pre-service teacher who understands the grammatical form of *"Could you possibly open the window?"* but fails to recognize its degree of indirectness relative to the social distance between interlocutors demonstrates grammatical competence without pragmatic mastery. Similarly, a learner who produces *"You are wrong"* in response to a peer's academic argument – rather than a face-saving alternative such as *"That's an interesting point, though I would approach it differently"* – reveals a gap between linguistic knowledge and pragmatic appropriateness. These examples illustrate that teacher education programs must explicitly target both dimensions rather than assuming pragmatic awareness develops incidentally through linguistic exposure.

Second, effective pragmatic processing requires learners to construct dynamic mental representations of communicative situations rather than simply decode surface-level linguistic forms. A future teacher encountering the utterance *"It's getting cold in here"* must activate not only lexical and syntactic knowledge but also contextual schemas, inferential reasoning, and awareness of implied communicative intent. Likewise, interpreting a student's silence after a teacher's question demands the ability to read non-verbal and discourse-level cues – a capacity that goes beyond grammar. Tasks built around such inferential demands, including analyzing ambiguous classroom exchanges or identifying implied criticism in written feedback, proved most effective in stimulating cognitive-pragmatic engagement.

Third, the designed task system confirmed that explicit consciousness-raising activities produce tangible and observable gains in learners' pragmatic awareness. Tasks requiring students to reformulate a blunt academic request such as *"Send me the article"* into a contextually appropriate alternative – *"I was wondering if you might be able to share the article when you have a chance"* – engaged metalinguistic reflection and pragmatic production simultaneously. Further tasks involving the analysis of politeness strategies in authentic academic emails, or the comparison of direct and indirect refusals across cultural contexts, reinforced the insight that pragmatic choices are never linguistically neutral but always socially and relationally consequential. These findings confirm that cognitive-pragmatic competence is not an innate ability but a systematically teachable dimension of professional language use.

Fourth, the three-phase task structure – pre-task awareness building, during-task communicative performance, and post-task reflection – proved most effective when grounded in professionally relevant scenarios. Role plays involving academic advising sessions, peer observation feedback discussions, parent-teacher communication, and classroom conflict resolution engaged participants at a deeper cognitive-pragmatic level than generic conversational tasks. These contexts mirror the authentic communicative demands of the teaching profession and thus created meaningful conditions for competence development. Post-task reflection sessions, in which participants analyzed their own pragmatic choices and considered alternative formulations, were particularly valuable in fostering the metacognitive dimension of cognitive-pragmatic competence – an awareness of not only what was said, but why, and what effect it was likely to produce.

Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that cognitive-pragmatic competence constitutes an essential yet insufficiently addressed dimension of pre-service English language teacher education. Drawing on theoretical frameworks in cognitive linguistics, interlanguage pragmatics, and task-based language teaching, a principled system of communicative tasks was designed and evaluated, confirming that this competence is systematically teachable when instruction is explicit, contextually grounded, and professionally oriented. The findings indicate that tasks incorporating inferential reasoning, metalinguistic reflection, and authentic professional scenarios are most effective in developing learners' ability to interpret and produce language in contextually and socially appropriate ways. It is hoped that the proposed task system will contribute to enriching pre-service teacher education curricula and serve as a foundation for further empirical research into cognitive-pragmatic competence development in foreign language teaching contexts.

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