REVIEW

The Digital Decade (2014–2024): Pragmatic Competence for EFL Learners in a Tech-Enhanced Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article examines new empirical studies on the development of pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It focuses on the effectiveness of various teaching methods and how technology can be utilised to enhance learning environments. The sociopragmatic awareness of EFL learners is a crucial component of successful communication across different social and cultural contexts and effective teaching techniques are essential for its development. Learners should be afforded numerous opportunities to practise the language in a manner that is contextually appropriate in pragmatics instruction, notably through tasks that involve real-world speech acts such as requests, refusals, and compliments. The review examines the primary pedagogical trends and their impact on students' ability to

perform speech acts, such as requesting items, making suggestions, and responding to compliments. It achieves this by combining studies that employed explicit, inductive, input-based, and flipped instruction, as well as those that utilised Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). The results show that explicit and inductive instruction significantly improves students' pragmatic awareness and memory. On the other hand, CALL-supported instruction and familiarity with the context help students feel more confident and involved. The review emphasizes that MMORPGs should incorporate scaffolded speech-act tasks, as demonstrated in Zhang, particularly for learners who lack easy access to immersive second language environments.

Keywords: Teaching; Pragmatic Competence; Technology; CALL; Language Teaching Curriculum; Global Village; Culture; Lingua Franca

1. Introduction

English serves as the lingua franca of globalisation, worldwide communication, commerce, and media, so engendering several motivations for its acquisition[1]. English is no longer seen as the exclusive domain of the English-speaking world; rather, it is considered an international language, often referred to as English as an International Language. English is used to communicate between native and non-native speakers, as well as between non-native speakers and native speakers. Researchers need to examine the sociopragmatic awareness of EFL learners is a crucial component of successful communication across different social and cultural contexts, and effective teaching techniques are essential for its development, which refers to how L2 learners can effectively handle communicative demands by using communication strategies skillfully while negotiating their identity[2]. Of course, it is also reasonable for teachers to stop relying only on idealised native-speaker models of what is proper, polite, and formal in their teaching and instead include a non-essentialist point of view in formal lessons. Acquiring L2 pragmatic development entails understanding the rules and principles governing participant behaviour within a society (sociopragmatics) and the capacity to select appropriate language to express those norms (pragmalinguistics). Acquiring pragmatic appropriateness in a second language (L2) is challenging[3]; yet, while it can be achieved without formal training, research indicates that such instruction facilitates progress[4]. Bachman and Palmer assert that pragmatic knowledge encompasses the interplay of utterances, language users, and contexts, reinforcing the perspectives of prominent academics who preceded them in the subject. Crystal characterises pragmatics as the examina-

tion of language from the perspective of users, particularly focussing on their choices, the limitations they face in social interactions, and the impact of their linguistic usage on other communicators involved in the exchange.

Exploring the importance of pragmatic competence as part of communicative competence development is crucial in foreign language education. Achieving proficiency in a foreign language involves more than just vocabulary and grammar; it also requires the skill to use these elements appropriately within different contexts. To fully grasp pragmatic competence, it is essential to define the terms "pragmatics" and "competence." Sociopragmatic awareness specifically refers to the capacity to select suitable linguistic expressions according to particular social situations. This is closely related to Byram's intercultural speaker, as L2 speakers need to possess ILP skills to interact successfully with culturally different people. These skills enable them to interpret meaning in their L2. For this reason, L2 pragmatic competence is vital in intercultural communication[5].

Contemporary methodologies in teaching English as a second language emphasise its utility as a practical instrument and global commodity[6], rather than as a means of cultural enrichment. For a long time, building students' vocabulary and understanding of grammar structures has been the primary goal of teachers who teach a foreign language. Still, the last 100 years have seen significant changes in this area, such as the rise of the now-familiar pragmatic approach[7]. This, in particular, showed how important it is to have both language skills (knowledge of grammatical patterns and the ability to assimilate the language's vocabulary), which has been the primary goal of teaching up to this point. As a result of these circumstances, the approach that persisted into the new millennium is Communicative

Language Teaching. Indeed, the tenets of this methodology are as follows:

1. Language acquisition entails the ability to communicate effectively.
2. Learners acquire a language by utilising it for communication.
3. Fluency and correctness are essential components of authentic and meaningful discourse.

Numerous linguists have employed the term competence in various contexts to denote distinct forms of knowledge. Noam Chomsky, the progenitor of linguistics, initially articulated the concept of competence. In his work "Aspects of the Theory of Syntax", he characterises competence as: "Linguistic theory is primarily concerned with an ideal speaker-listener." In a wholly homogeneous speech community, individuals possess complete mastery of their language and remain impervious to grammatically irrelevant factors such as memory constraints, distractions, fluctuations in attention and interest, and errors, whether random or systematic, in the application of their linguistic knowledge during actual performance. The pragmatic awareness of EFL learners is a crucial component of successful communication across various social and cultural contexts, and effective teaching techniques are essential for its development[8]. Learners should be afforded numerous opportunities to practise the language in a manner that is contextually appropriate in pragmatics instruction, notably through tasks that involve real-world speech acts such as requests, refusals, and compliments. The outcomes of this bibliometric review make a valuable contribution to the expanding corpus of knowledge in this field, providing useful insights for educators, curriculum designers, and institutions that support language teaching instruction. Based on the insights of all the above scholars, we have concluded that pragmatic competence involves using language in a manner that suits the situation. This means taking into account factors such as social behaviour, the ability to use speech acts, social power (or status), and social distance in a given speech situation[9]. This refers to the ability to use language correctly in various situations. It includes both functional and sociolinguistic factors. In contrast to conventional systematic reviews, which evaluate the quality of research or focus on definitions, bibliometric reviews are designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature, thereby assisting stakeholders in understanding the scope, trends, and gaps in the development of pragmatic competence among EFL learners.

2. Materials and Methods

In this review, our primary objective was to amass regional knowledge by scouring existing research. Bibliometric reviews aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the literature, rather than evaluating research quality or defining terminology[10]. Utilizing the Web of Science database, the most prevalent bibliographic online resource, we executed an extensive search from 2014 to 2024 applying the keywords "teaching" and "pragmatic competence" across all nations. WOS was selected for its rigorous indexing, though future reviews could expand sources. Our analysis was finalized in December 2024. From the 226 global papers identified, we selected a subset for further examination of pragmatic competence in teaching. We employed multiple programs to handle and visualize the data, including a CSV file, Microsoft Excel 2021, RIS, VOS Viewer, and Map Chart, each fulfilling a distinct role in our investigation. In conclusion, we examined 51 documents, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

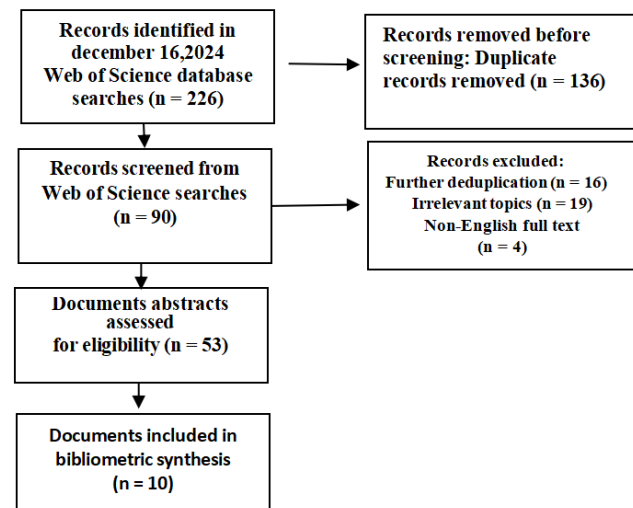

Figure 1. Data Identification Flow Chart.

3. Results

3.1. Trend of Publications on Pragmatic Competence in All Countries

Pragmatic competence denotes the capacity to understand, formulate, and express meanings that are both precise

and suitable for the social and cultural contexts of communication. A total of 226 papers were published between 2014 and 2024 on teaching pragmatic competence in all countries (**Figure 2**).
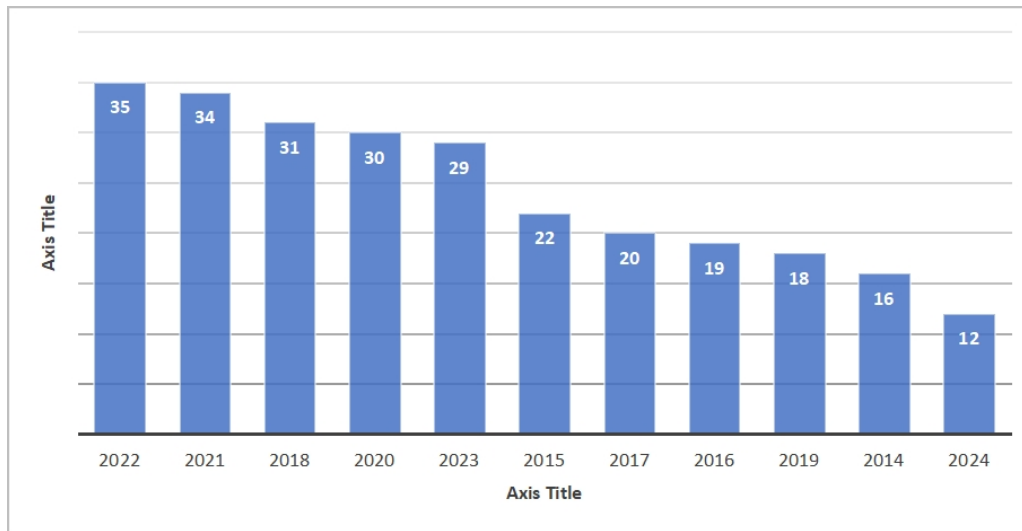
Figure 2. Annual production of articles on pragmatic competence during the period 2014–2024.

- Analysis of Publication Trends: Yearly Distribution of Records

The distribution of publication records across different years reveals interesting trends in research output, as reflected in the data provided. This dataset categorizes the number of publications by year, spanning from 2014 to 2024.

- Overview of Publication Distribution

A closer inspection of the publication records highlights specific patterns in research output over the years. The year 2022 exhibits the highest number of publications, with a total of 35 records. This represents a peak in publication activity, which could reflect heightened research activity or increased interest in specific topics during that period.

Following 2022, the number of publications remains relatively high in 2021, with 34 records, indicating a consistent level of scholarly output in the preceding year. This slight decrease from 2022 to 2021 is marginal and may reflect factors such as the evolving nature of research priorities or external influences on the research community, including global events or changes in funding.

- Declining Trends in Recent Years

In contrast, the years 2020 and 2023 show a decrease in the number of publications, with 30 and 29 records, respectively. These years mark a notable decline compared to the peaks of 2021 and 2022, although the drop is not extreme. The lower publication counts in 2020 may be attributed to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted research activities due to lockdowns, restrictions, or shifts in research priorities towards pandemic-related issues. In 2023, the drop may be attributed to the natural lag in research processes, where data collection, publication cycles, and peer review may lead to a lower volume of outputs in a given year.

- Historical Publication Trends

When examining the years before 2020, a clear downward trend is visible. The year 2018 saw 31 publications, while 2019 had only 18. This decrease suggests a possible shift in research priorities or changes in research funding, leading to a reduced output during these years. As we look further back, the number of records gradually decreases: 2017 had 20 publications, 2016 had 19, and 2014 recorded 16 publications. These figures indicate a general decline in publications over the past decade, reflecting both the evolution of the research landscape and potential shifts in academic focus, funding, or collaboration dynamics.

Interestingly, while the dataset includes 2024, it shows a projected or preliminary record count of 12. This number may reflect either early-stage publications or an underestimation due to the year not being fully completed. The early data for 2024 may also indicate a potential decline in research

outputs compared to previous years. However, it is essential to note that this figure is subject to change as the year progresses and more publications are completed and recorded. To summarise, the data presented highlights a significant trend of fluctuating publication volumes over the years, with the highest number of records observed in 2022 and 2021, followed by a steady decline in subsequent years. This decline can be attributed to several factors, including external disruptions, shifting academic priorities, and resource constraints. The projected lower number of publications for 2024 signals a potential continuation of this downward trend; however, it is essential to monitor how this projection evolves as more data becomes available.

3.2. Top Research Areas on Pragmatic Competence

Linguistics is the largest contributor to research on pragmatic awareness, with 134 papers (**Figure 3**), highlighting its central role in understanding how meaning is conveyed through context, tone, and cultural norms. Pragmatic competence is crucial in second language acquisition, language teaching, and multilingualism. Key areas of study include speech acts, politeness theory, conversation analysis, and cross-cultural communication.
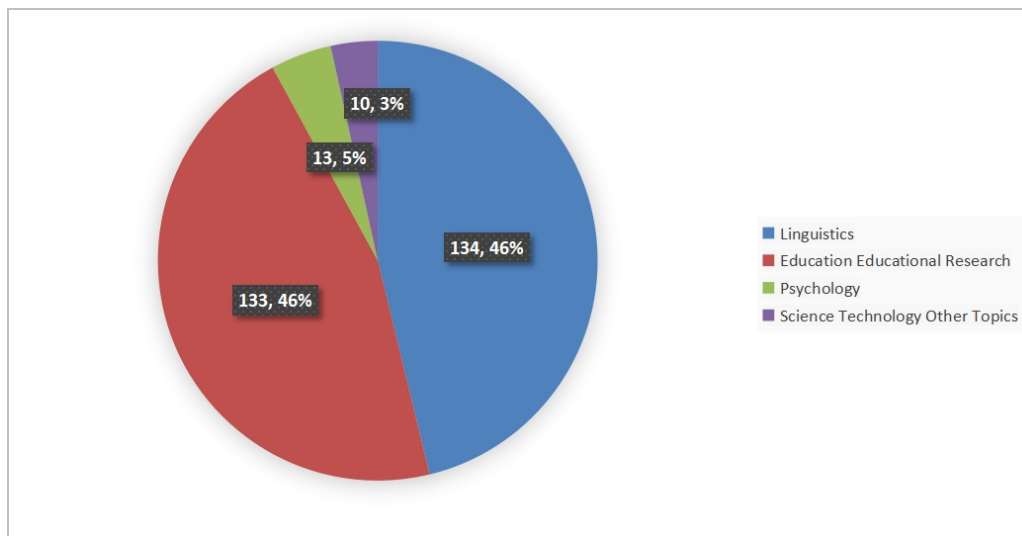
Figure 3. Research area on pragmatic competence.

Educational research closely follows, with 133 papers, focusing on how students learn pragmatic skills in second languages and how educators can effectively incorporate these skills into their curricula. This is especially relevant in multicultural and multilingual classrooms.

Psychology contributes 13 papers, studying how pragmatic information is processed in social interactions, including areas such as developmental pragmatic competence and challenges faced by individuals with conditions like autism or aphasia.

The Science and Technology field, with 10 papers, explores pragmatic competence in professional and technical contexts, particularly in multilingual environments and the development of AI technologies that mimic pragmatic communication. In summary, Linguistics and Educational Research are the primary contributors to pragmatic competence research, while psychology, science, and Technology offer valuable insights into the cognitive, social, and professional aspects of communication.

3.3. Top-Cited Journals on Pragmatic Competence

The provided table lists academic journals and their citation counts, which have more than five citations, arranged in descending order of citations. The data highlights the following: The journal "System" has the highest citation count at 165, followed by "Actualidades pedagogicas" with 139 citations, and "TESOL journal" with 109. A significant number of journals have between 50 and 100 citations, such

as "International Review of Education" (104), "Language Teaching Research" (98), and "Iral-International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching" (71). Several journals in the 20-50 citation range include "Teaching and Teacher Education" (51a) and "ELT Journal" (48). The citation count gradually decreases as the table progresses, with journals having between 5 and 20 citations. Journals like "TESOL Quarterly" and "Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods" each have 15 citations. A few journals have less than five citations, with the least cited journal, "Asian Englishes", having only 1 citation. The data offers a comprehensive view of the citation impact of various journals in the field of language education and linguistics (**Table 1**).

Table 1. List of top-cited journals on pragmatic competence.

Source Title	Times Cited, All Databases
System	165
Actualidades pedagogicas	139
Tesol journal	109
International review of education	104
Language teaching research	98
Iral-international review of applied linguistics in language teaching	71
Studies in second language learning and teaching	60
Academic medicine	57
Computer assisted language learning	56
Modern language journal	54
Calico journal	52
Teaching and teacher education	51
Elt journal	48
Intercultural pragmatics	47
Foreign language annals	38
Scandinavian journal of educational research	31
Relc journal	30
Language testing	29
Language and sociocultural theory	28
Task-based approaches to teaching and assessing pragmatics	27
Language awareness	27
Journal of english for academic purposes	27
Language learning & technology	26
Innovation in language learning and teaching	24
English teaching and learning	21
Teachers and teaching	20
Asian-pacific journal of second and foreign language education	19
Iranian journal of language teaching research	17
Teaching and learning in medicine	16
Bmc medical education	16
Tesol quarterly	15
Modern journal of language teaching methods	15
Journal of politeness research-language behaviour culture	14
Journal of early childhood teacher education	14
Humor-international journal of humor research	14
English for specific purposes	14
Translation: a multidisciplinary approach	13
Tesl canada journal	13
Language teaching	13
Journal of english as a lingua franca	13
Research in autism spectrum disorders	12
Journal of nutrition education and behavior	11
Eurasia journal of mathematics science and technology education	11
International journal of management education	10
Corpus pragmatics	10
Yazyk i kultura-language and culture	9

Table 1. *Cont.*

Source Title	Times Cited, All Databases
Journal of pragmatics	9
How-a colombian journal for teachers of english	9
Critical turn in language and intercultural communication pedagogy: theory, research and practice	9
Cogent education	9
Language and dialogue	8
Journal of engineering education	8
International journal for research in vocational education and training-ijrvet	8
Critical reflections on data in second language acquisition	8
Revista signos	7
Gms journal for medical education	7
International review of pragmatics	6
Australian educational researcher	6
Teaching in higher education	5
Journal of multicultural discourses	5
Journal of asia tefl	5
International journal of instruction	5
Handbook of research on teaching methods in language translation and interpretation	5
From pragmatics to dialogue	5
Colombian applied linguistics journal	5
Babel-revue internationale de la traduction-international journal of translation	5

3.4. Top Authors and Number of Their Scientific Paper on Pragmatic Competence

The table displays the number of articles associated with several authors in the field of pragmatic competence (**Figure 4**). This description summarizes the data trends and provides a clear overview of each author's scientific paper distribution.

The authors with the highest number of records are González-lloret M, Taguchi N, and Youn SJ, each with four records. A group of authors have three records: Moghaddam MM, Martínez-flor A, Nguyen MTT, Ren W, and Zhang Y.

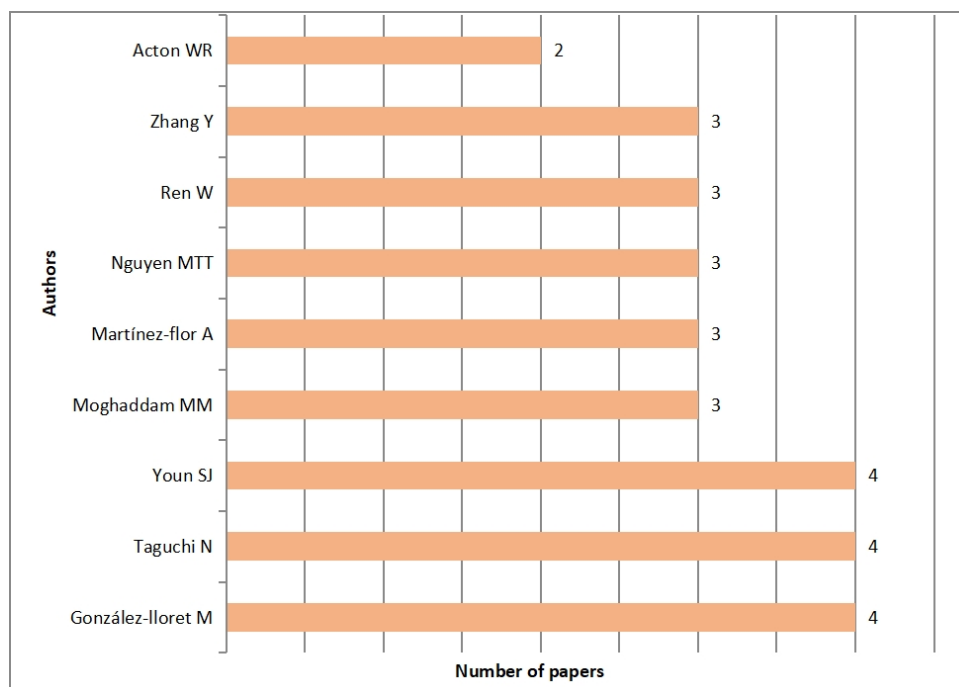The author with the fewest records is Acton WR, who has two records.

Figure 4. List of top authors published on pragmatic competence in all countries.

Conclusion: In summary, most authors listed have 3 or 4 records, with Acton WR being the exception with a lower record count of two. The table suggests that most authors in this list have a similar contribution level, with only a slight variation in the number of records.

3.5. Top Affiliations with Their Article Count on Pragmatic Competence

The figure outlines the affiliations of different universities and organisations, along with their respective article counts (**Figure 5**). The leading institution is Islamic Azad University, which tops the list with the highest article count of 7. Close competitors include Carnegie Mellon University

and Northern Arizona University, both with six articles. Intermediate figures: The University of Hawaii System has five articles, indicating moderate representation. Additional affiliations: Several institutions, including the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, Universitat Jaume I, and the University of Oregon, each have four articles, showcasing significant yet lesser involvement. Finally, Beihang University and Complutense University of Madrid have lower counts of 3 each, representing minimal participation compared to the leading affiliations. To sum up, Islamic Azad University stands out significantly. At the same time, a variety of other universities exhibit varying levels of involvement, with a notable decline in record counts for the last two institutions.
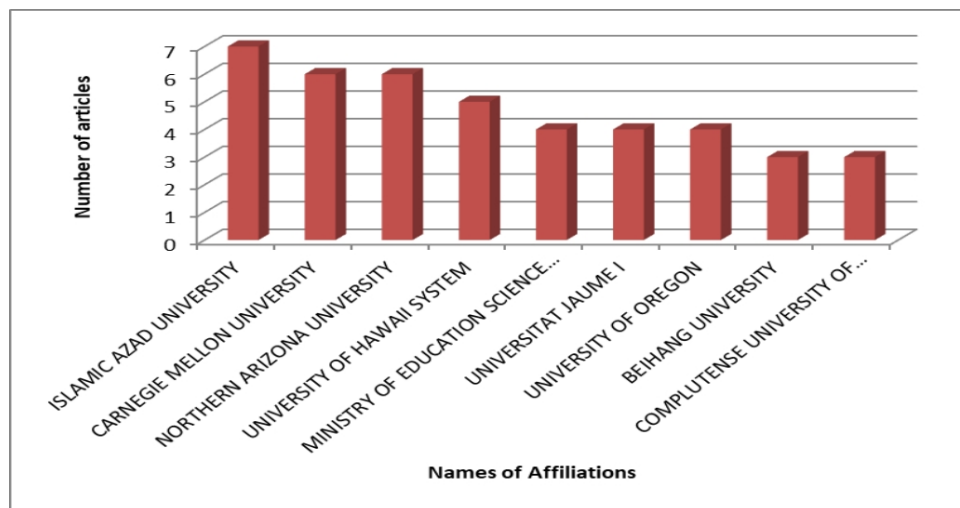

Figure 5. List of top 9 most active Affiliations.

3.6. Top Active Countries on Pragmatic Competence

The number of publications shows the ten most of productive countries in the field of pragmatic competence research between 2014 and 2024. Among them, US dominated with 75 publications, followed by Iran 32, Spain 30, China 22, Germany 13, Canada 13, England and Russia 9 (see **Figure 6**).

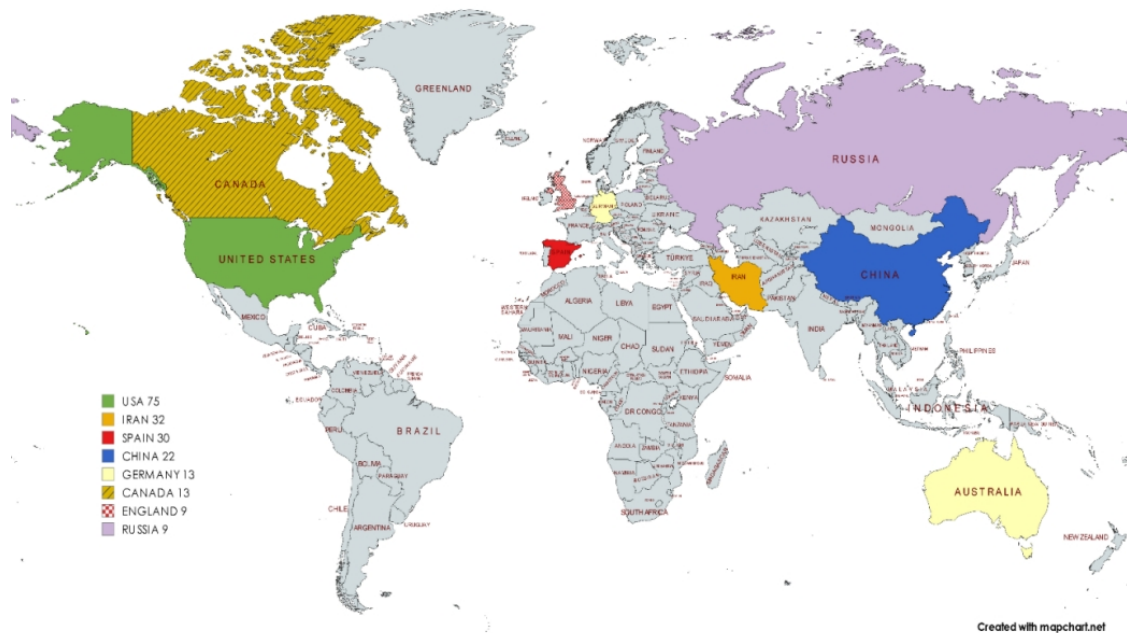## 3.7. Top Cited Papers on Pragmatic Competence

The table provides 11 research articles' citation counts, publication years, authors, document types, and source ti-

tles (**Table 2**). Overall, the data shows that the articles span from 2014 to 2024, with a range of citation counts, from a high of 82 in WoS Core to a low of 28. The articles cover topics related to language learning, pragmatics, and cultural competence, highlighting contributions to fields such as L2 Spanish sociopragmatics, the teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF), and the role of technology in learning. The article titled "Self-directed Learning: A Fundamental Competence in a Rapidly Changing World" by Morris (2019) has the highest citation count, with 82 in WoS Core and 104 in all databases. In contrast, "Negotiating Pragmatic Competence in Computer-Mediated Communication: The Case of Korean Address Terms" by Kim and Brown (2014) has the lowest citations at 28 in WoS Core and 33 in all databases. Authors like Taguchi, N and González-Lloret, M have contributed to

multiple articles, and the majority of the documents are published in well-known journals such as "System", "Modern Language journal", and "Academic Medicine". In conclusion, it shows a variety of works that make contributions to the field of language teaching, with a focus on pragmatic skills and use of technology in language learning.

Figure 6. List of top countries on pragmatic competence.

Table 2. List of top cited publications on pragmatic competence.

Article Title	Times Cited, WoS Core	Times Cited, All Databases	Publication Year	Authors	Document Type	Source Title
Self-directed learning: A fundamental competence in a rapidly changing world	82	104	2019	Morris, TH	Article	International Review of Education
Contextually speaking: A survey of pragmatic learning abroad, in class, and online	63	75	2015	Taguchi, N	Article	System
In Search of a New Paradigm for Teaching English as an International Language	59	77	2014	Canagarajah, S	Article	TESOL Journal
The Pragmatics of English as a Lingua Franca: Research and Pedagogy in the Era of Globalization	55	58	2018	Taguchi, N; Ishihara, N	Article	Annual Review of Applied Linguistics
Integrating Theory, Content, and Method to Foster Critical Consciousness in Medical Students: A Comprehensive Model for Cultural Competence Training	47	57	2017	Dao, DK; Goss, AL; Hoekzema, AS; Kelly, LA; Logan, AA; Mehta, SD; Sandesara, UN; Munyikwa, MR; DeLisser, HM	Article	Academic Medicine
Teaching L2 Spanish Sociopragmatics Through Concepts: A Classroom-Based Study	37	43	2016	Van Compernolle, RA; Gomez-Laich, MP; Weber, A	Article	Modern Language Journal

Table 2. *Cont.*

Article Title	Times Cited, WoS Core	Times Cited, All Databases	Publication Year	Authors	Document Type	Source Title
Learning Chinese Formulaic Expressions in a Scenario-Based Interactive Environment	31	38	2017	Taguchi, N; Li, Q; Tang, XF	Article	Foreign Language Annals
Technology and L2 Pragmatics Learning	30	37	2019	González-Lloret, M	Article	Annual Review of Applied Linguistics
Negotiating Pragmatic Competence in Computer Mediated Communication: The Case of Korean Address Terms	28	33	2014	Kim, EYA; Brown, L	Article	CALICO Journal
ELF and Communication Strategies: Are They Taken into Account in ELT Materials?	28	30	2018	Vettorel, P	Article	RELC Journal

3.8. Top Co-Authorship and Key Words on Pragmatic Competence

Using bibliographic data, a VOS viewer can create maps illustrating co-authorship, keyword co-occurrences, citations, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation relationships. It supports file formats like .txt, RIS, and .csv from databases such as Scopus. In this study, the raw data file was imported into the VOS viewer, which then produced co-authorship and keyword co-occurrence maps, as presented in **Figures 7** and **8**. The co-authorship analysis yielded a network comprising more than a hundred authors. There are 50 items distributed over 37 clusters, each cluster containing 1–3 items.

Figure 7. Network map of top co-authorships based on the total link strength.

The analysis produced 120 keywords. Following the elimination of general keywords with low relevance scores and infrequent occurrences, 70 items were ultimately discovered. Each resultant term is represented as a node, forming a network map based on the overall strength of the links. **Figure 8** illustrates the network map, which depicts the co-occurrence of keywords among the top 50 authors. The node's size indicates the significance of the keyword. There are 70 items distributed over 6 clusters: cluster 1 (abroad, classroom, CMC, computer-mediated, context, conversation analysis, corpus, discourse, German, international competence, knowledge, L2 pragmatics, Second language

pragmatics, talk, technology, telecollaboration), cluster 2 (Chinese, compliment responses, compliments, EFL learners, English, English as a foreign language, explicit, non-native speakers, politeness, pragmatic awareness, pragmatic development, request, strategies, student), cluster 3 (second language, apology, communicative competence, EFL, instructions, interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic failure, pragmatics, refusals, request, speech acts), cluster 4 (aware- ness, comprehension, conventional expression, ESL, interlanguage, language, learning, length, model, motivation, performance, proficiency), cluster 5 (assessment, communication, culture, curriculum, education, identity, intercultural community, intercultural competence, perceptions, lingua franca, skills, speakers), cluster 6 (acquisition, higher education, L2 pragmatics, Spanish). Total link strength (1691) and links (966).
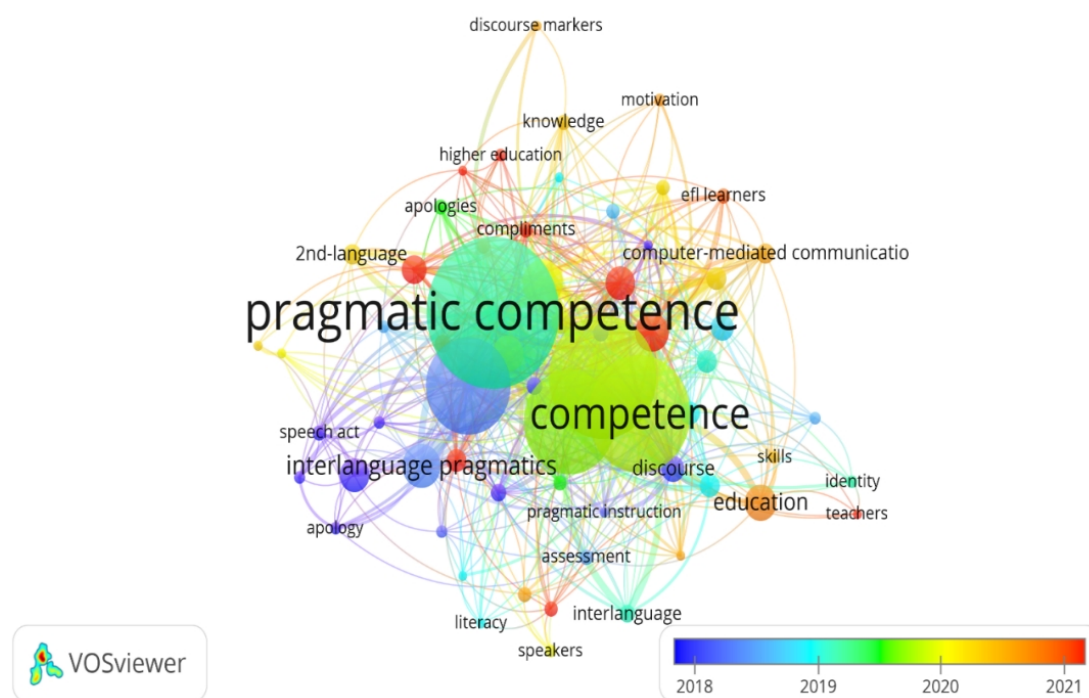

Figure 8. Network map of top keywords based on the total link strength.

4. Discussion

This bibliometric review provides insights into recent research trends in the field of L2 pragmatic development, with particular focus on speech acts such as request[9], complimenting[11], and refusing[12], and on instructional approaches that foster communicative competence and pragmatic competence in second language learners[13]. The analysis reveals four dominant thematic categories across the selected studies:

1. activities and tasks targeting specific speech acts[9],
2. pedagogical methods for pragmatics instruction[14],
3. technology-mediated environments for pragmatic development[15],

4. pragmatic tools and discourse features used in learner production[16].

This bibliometric review synthesizes recent trends in second language (L2) pragmatic development, particularly within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, with a focus on speech acts such as requests, compliments, and refusals. While the results section outlined the effectiveness of various instructional methods and technological tools, the discussion now aims to go beyond a descriptive summary by critically examining *why* these interventions work, *under what conditions* they succeed, and what theoretical lenses help make sense of the emerging patterns and discrepancies (see **Table 3**).

Table 3. List of articles enhancing EFL learners through enhanced tech-tools and methods.

Study	Participant Characteristics, Sample size (EG/CG)	Used Technology/Games/Tools; Approaches/Methods.	Main Results
Zhang[6]	105 English-as-a-foreign-language learners from a university in China	massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs)	The implications for language policy-making and instruction are examined regarding the efficacy of MMORPGs for learners lacking immersion in the target language setting or limited opportunities to engage in diverse social scenarios in a second language.
Ziafar[17]	Sixty-three individuals were randomly allocated to three treatment groups and received distinct educational interventions across ten 30-minute sessions.	contrastive lexical approach (CLA), in comparison with explicit and implicit approaches,	The results indicated that a pragmatic teaching course is advisable, integrating effective teaching strategies and practices from all three approaches to enhance pragmatic competence.
Zhang[18]	Sixty-two EFL students from a Chinese institution were enlisted for this research.	computer-assisted language learning (CALL)	The findings enhance our understanding of the beneficial and lasting impact of integrating Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) with instruction on the pragmatic development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Furthermore, pedagogical implications for implementing Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) with second language pragmatics training are presented.
Asvad & Sadighi[19]	Iranian EFL learners	input-based instruction of English suggestions and requests	The findings demonstrated that input-based education on English suggestions and requests positively influences the syntactic complexity of the speech actions generated by participants in the post-tests compared to the pre-tests.
Li et al. [20]	two cohorts of Chinese undergraduates at a conventional college	flipped classroom approach	The pre-test and post-test outcomes showed that the flipped learning approach influenced the five identified sub-competencies in varying ways. Notably, the flipped classroom group outperformed the control group in the post-test, suggesting that this approach had a generally positive impact on enhancing communicative competence among EFL learners.
Qi & Lai[21]	Forty-two intermediate-level Chinese as a Second Language learners	explicit instruction, deductive instruction, and inductive instruction through self-access websites	The study found a significantly greater effect of the inductive approach on learners' DCT performance in both the immediate and delayed posttest. This suggests that inductive instruction might be more effective in teaching the speech act of request in CSL.
Nguyen et al. [22]	Five intermediate-level groups of learners studying syntactic downgraders to mitigate their email requests	Instruction centred on pragmatics utilising various forms of written corrective feedback (CF)	The results indicated that all four treatment groups significantly outperformed the control group across all three post-tests; however, there were no notable differences in performance among the treatment groups themselves following the intervention.
Mehrpak et al. [23]	Iranian EFL learners	a questionnaire consisting of 20 situations	Iranian EFL learners tend to initiate communication more readily in familiar scenarios, such as group discussions or conversations with friends. However, they lack confidence in unfamiliar contexts, like public speaking. This suggests that familiarity with the context and the interlocutor plays a significant role in a learner's willingness to initiate communication.
Ziashahabi et al. [24]	participants were 63 intermediate EFL learners randomly assigned	explicit vs. implicit instructions of implicatures	The findings demonstrated that learners who received explicit instruction outperformed those who received implicit instruction, indicating that explicit teaching was more effective in enhancing pragmatic competence. Moreover, the study showed that content delivered through explicit instruction had significantly higher retention rates after one week.
Khalaji & Golnesaei[25]	EFL learners	explicit instruction Discourse Completion Test (DCT)	The results indicated that explicit instruction effectively enhances the pragmatic competence of L2 learners. Additionally, L2 proficiency was shown to impact the overall appropriateness of speech act production.

4.1. Technology-Mediated Pragmatics: Contextual Affordances and Scaffolding

One of the clearest trends across the reviewed studies is the increasing use of technology to support pragmatic development—via CALL, MMORPGs, flipped classrooms, and online instructional modules. These tools appear particularly effective when aligned with Vygotskyan principles of mediated learning and scaffolding. Platforms such as MMORPGs, for instance, provide learners with socially rich, interactional environments that simulate authentic L2 contexts. These platforms serve as digital zones of proximal development (ZPD), where learners engage in tasks slightly beyond their current ability levels, supported by both peers and the system's built-in feedback mechanisms.

However, not all technology-mediated approaches produce uniform long-term benefits. While several studies highlight the *sustained* efficacy of CALL[25], others caution that effectiveness may diminish without continued reinforcement (as implicitly suggested in retention disparities). This contradiction invites further inquiry into sustainability factors, such as the role of feedback, the learner's agency, and the alignment between digital task design and real-world pragmatic functions. The pedagogical success of tech-enhanced learning seems contingent not merely on access to tools but on how these tools are integrated into meaningful, context-rich, and socially guided activities.

4.2. Explicit and Inductive Instruction: Depth of Processing and Learner Readiness

Another dominant theme is the superiority of explicit and inductive teaching methods over implicit ones in fostering pragmatic competence. However, rather than restating this as a categorical outcome, it is vital to interrogate the mechanisms behind their effectiveness.

Explicit instruction appears to succeed by enhancing learners' metapragmatic awareness—enabling them to consciously notice and internalize sociocultural norms associated with speech acts. This aligns with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, which posits that conscious awareness is a prerequisite for language acquisition, especially in domains like pragmatics that involve culturally embedded norms. Furthermore, studies showing high retention following explicit instruction suggest that learners not only grasp but *retain*

pragmatic rules when they are made salient and revisited through reinforcement.

On the other hand, inductive approaches—where learners infer rules from rich input—capitalize on cognitive engagement and learner autonomy. These methods may be particularly effective for speech acts like requests[6] because they mirror how pragmatics is often acquired in real life: through repeated exposure and hypothesis-testing in context. The implication here is that learner variables—such as prior exposure, cognitive style, and L2 proficiency—likely mediate the success of explicit vs. inductive methods, suggesting a need for differentiated instruction based on learner profiles.

4.3. Learner-Centered Models: Confidence, Familiarity, and Sociopragmatic Readiness

Several studies[22] show that learners' willingness to initiate communication is influenced by their familiarity with both interlocutors and contexts. This finding intersects with sociocultural theories of language learning that stress the role of identity, affect, and confidence in L2 use. Here, the challenge is not simply about knowledge of speech acts but about the social risk involved in pragmatic performance.

In response, pedagogical models must do more than teach the "right" linguistic forms. They must also simulate diverse communicative scenarios—varying in power dynamics, formality, and cultural expectations—to help learners develop strategic competence. This involves not only knowing what to say, but knowing *how* and *when* to say it, depending on the social stakes. Learner-centered environments such as flipped classrooms and simulations offer promising venues for this type of experiential learning.

4.4. Gaps and Inconsistencies: Toward a Research Agenda

Despite promising findings, the review reveals several underexplored areas and methodological inconsistencies. For example, while many studies report gains in pragmatic performance post-intervention, few examine longitudinal effects, particularly in real-life communicative settings. Similarly, the limited sample sizes and context-specific designs (e.g., Chinese or Iranian EFL learners in most studies) raise concerns about generalizability.

Moreover, some tools like CALL are praised in certain studies for their long-term benefits, yet others show only immediate gains or insufficient detail about delayed testing. This inconsistency could stem from variation in the quality of instructional integration, learner autonomy, or feedback mechanisms embedded in each tool. Such contradictions underscore the need for multi-phase studies that evaluate both short-term performance and long-term pragmatic transfer.

4.5. Toward an Integrated Instructional Framework

Given the evidence, the most compelling pedagogical direction is one that synthesizes the strengths of multiple approaches: combining explicit instruction for awareness, inductive tasks for generalization, tech-enhanced interaction for contextual realism, and learner-centered models to build communicative confidence. The consistent superiority of experimental groups over control groups suggests that pragmatic competence is best developed through integrated, intentional, and contextually sensitive instruction—not incidental exposure.

In policy terms, this suggests a shift from grammar-heavy curricula toward pragmatically enriched syllabi, particularly for learners without immersive L2 environments. Policymakers and curriculum developers should emphasize pragmatic transferability, intercultural sensitivity, and strategic communication, supported by digital tools that allow repeated, feedback-rich interaction.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this bibliometric study analyzed research on teaching speaking skills over the past 10 years, divided into three main periods. The study yielded exciting findings through keyword analysis of research topics, co-citation analysis of authors and publications, and analysis of publishers and institutions. Countries with an EFL context, such as the USA, Iran, Spain, China, Germany, Canada, England, and Russia, have focused more on developing learners' pragmatic competence. They contributed more to teaching pragmatic competence in education studies. In addition, the analysis of author distribution revealed that new researchers were constantly entering this field. Moreover, this review underscores the pedagogical imperative of treating pragmatic competence not as a peripheral skill but as central to communicative competence. While much progress has been made in identifying effective instructional strategies, future research must address gaps in longitudinal impact, cross-contextual transfer, and the interactive roles of technology, cognition, and culture in shaping pragmatic development. By grounding instructional design in both empirical evidence and sociocognitive theory, educators can better prepare learners to navigate the complex demands of real-world communication in a second language. Despite the valuable contributions of these works, specific gaps are evident. First, there is limited research on pragmatic development among underrepresented learner populations, such as those in Central Asia. Longitudinal studies in Uzbek contexts could test CALL's cross-cultural applicability. Second, while several studies use innovative teaching tools, few systematically evaluate their effectiveness across contexts or learning environments. Additionally, the dominance of English as the target L2 limits broader generalization to other language-pair scenarios. The reviewed studies reflect a growing diversification in instructional design, research methodology, and technological integration within the field of L2 pragmatics. Future bibliometric and empirical studies should focus on underexplored learner groups, longitudinal effectiveness of digital tools, and the integration of multiple instructional frameworks to foster a more holistic development of communicative competence.

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Conflicts of Interest

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