

Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions and Knowledge of Pragmatic Aspects in EFL Teaching in Tanzania

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Abstract

Studies have shown that language teaching has been overly concerned with grammar while disregarding the importance of pragmatics. Despite this, the reasons behind this instructional approach have not been adequately investigated. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the knowledge and perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania, regarding the integration of pragmatics teaching into the classroom. A questionnaire was shared through Google Form and completed by thirty-six English language teachers from 8 secondary schools. Results revealed that the majority of teachers have a positive attitude towards the integration of pragmatics teaching and felt confident in their ability to incorporate it into their teaching, yet they have limited knowledge of pragmatics. These findings have implications for the quality of English language teaching and learning in the schools. The study recommends that more focus be given to the integration of pragmatics in the EFL teachers' education, as well as providing regular in-service training to English language teachers in Tanzania.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Teachers' knowledge, and Teachers' Perception

1. Introduction

The introduction of communicative competence models (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; 2010; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) marked a radical change in second and foreign language teaching/learning. The focus of second/foreign language learning shifted from mere mastery of language forms to the acquisition of functional and social use of these forms as well. Tangushi (2011) notes that since the emergence of these models, pragmatic competence has become an essential part of L2 proficiency, distinct from grammatical, discourse, and strategic competencies. Studies show that pragmatics is an important component in language proficiency (Kasper & Rose, 2001; Bardovi-harling et al., 1991). Thus, it has to be taught alongside grammar because being proficient in element of grammar cannot guarantee successful communication. Despite its importance, there has been a problem with language teaching focusing much more on grammatical aspects and neglecting pragmatic aspects of language. Several studies have indicated that pragmatics aspects are ignored in language classrooms even when it is well integrated into the curriculum (Wangia & Otonde, 2020; Enyi & Orji, 2019; Bardovi-Harlig, 2018).

Since the introduction of competence-based curriculum 2005, in Tanzania, the focus was expected to shift from emphasis of learners mastering of only grammatical competence to more communicative competence. The communicative competence comprised of several components which are grammatical, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competences. Despite all this changes, Elisifa, (2016) observed that the teaching of English language has continued to be ‘form focused’ in Tanzania. This means that grammatical aspect of language competence has dominated the teaching of English language in Tanzania. The factors that are attributed to this teaching orientation has not been studied thoroughly. Therefore, this study sought to examine the EFL teachers’ knowledge and perception towards the teaching of pragmatics in secondary schools in Tanzania as the potential factors for the form-focused teaching orientation.

Teachers’ knowledge and perception in language teaching and learning have been very important factor in determining the teachers practice in the classroom. Masrour et al. (2019) argue that “language teachers’ backgrounds, identities, attitudes, emotions, knowledge, experiences, and beliefs have an impact on their thinking processes and what and how they teach” (p. 239). Ishihara & Cohen (2010) assert that teachers practice in the classroom is susceptible to their knowledge and belief. They also claim that Teachers’ knowledge determines their “instructional, evaluative, and curricular decisions”. Teachers’ beliefs are also predisposed to influence their perceptions, thinking processes, and decision-making in the classroom (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Consequently, the integration of pragmatics in the teaching of the English language to foreign language learners is also influenced by teachers’ perceptions and knowledge among other factors. This is due to the fact that teachers’ perceptions and knowledge influence their practices in the classroom.

A large number of studies have been conducted in the area of interlanguage pragmatics teaching and learning worldwide. Examples of these studies include, Bardovi-harling et al., (1991); Kasper & Rose, (2001); Taguchi, (2011); and Choraih et al., (2017); all investigated

the role instruction on learners' acquisition of pragmatics competence. These studies conclude that for learners to develop pragmatics competences instruction is better than non-instruction.

Similarly, a number of studies have been conducted to examine the impact of explicit or implicit instruction on learners' pragmatics competence. Kelimeler, (2009) carried out a study to investigate if instruction can facilitate second language (L2) pragmatic development and if the type of instruction used in an L2 classroom setting affects learners' capacity to interpret and produce polite refusals in English. The experiment involved sixty 8th grade Primary School students from Gürsu, Turkey, thirty-three of whom were female and twenty-seven males. The results showed that implicit instruction had a significantly better effect on the learning of polite refusals than explicit instruction.

Qi & Lai, (2017) and Ahmadian, (2020) conducted studies to investigate the effectiveness of different instructional approaches for the development of the speech acts of requests and refusals, respectively. Qi & Lai (2017) examined the performance of 42 intermediate-level Chinese as a second language adult learners at a university in mainland China when exposed to explicit deductive instruction (DI) and explicit inductive instruction (II) in terms of the speech act of requesting. The participants were randomly assigned to two treatment groups and received video clips delivered via self-access websites. At the end, an open-ended discourse completion task (DCT) was used to compare the two groups. The results showed that explicit inductive instruction had a greater impact on the learners' pragmatic development of the speech act requests. On the other hand, Ahmadian (2020) studied the effects of implicit instruction of refusal strategies in English with 78 upper-intermediate EFL learners. The participants were divided into three groups (explicit, implicit, and control). Prior to the treatment, all participants took a working memory capacity test. Data collection was done through a discourse completion test (DCT) and a pragmatics comprehension questionnaire (CQ). The results indicated that explicit instruction was more effective than implicit instruction for both production and comprehension of refusals, with both groups sustaining the improvement two months later. These findings suggest that explicit instruction is important for language development, but that implicit instruction should not be ignored.

Nguyen et al., (2012) evaluated the relative effectiveness of two types of form-focused instruction on the acquisition of speech act of constructive criticism by sixty-nine Vietnamese high intermediate student teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). The study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test/ post-test and a control group. The results show that both implicit and explicit groups significantly improved in the immediate post-test over the pre-test surpassing the control group, and moreover maintained their improvement in the delayed post-test. The study found that the explicit group performed significantly better than the implicit group on all measures place.

Enyi & Orji (2019) conducted a study in Nigeria entitled Interlanguage Pragmatics and the Teaching of English in Nigeria's L2 Classrooms. The study aimed to raise consciousness to highlight the relevance and advantages of teaching pragmatics and developing pragmatics awareness in Nigerian classrooms. The study highlighted that pragmatics have not been

integrated into language curricula in Nigeria and that the absence of pragmatics teaching and learning have created a gap in communicative competence. The study recommends that pragmatics should be integrated into the English language curriculum from the early stages and as soon as possible.

Also, a study by Muhammad & Nair (2017) investigated the level of pragmatic competence for English as a Second Language (ESL) writing skills among Nigerian undergraduates. The findings indicated that most Nigerian undergraduates face challenges in terms of pragmatic competence that guide their skills in ESL writing. The research further indicates that the females committed more errors than the males.

The study by Wangia & Otonde (2020), on the other hand investigated politeness in teacher-student interactions in a Kenyan secondary school context and its implications for pedagogy in communication skills. The study aimed at investigating the impact of the teaching of politeness strategies to secondary school students. The study observe that the Kenyan school syllabus caters to teaching these politeness expressions across all curriculum levels, and learners are expected to observe the same. However, the study found out that Kenyan secondary school students have limitations in using politeness strategies and that the English language politeness strategies are at variance with the students' cultural orientation. The study observe that Politeness forms could be culturally sensitive. Thus, it is recommended that teaching of politeness should consider this fact.

A dearth of studies exists on Tanzanian teaching and learning of pragmatics clues/indices particularly on EFL teachers' perceptions and knowledge. Literature review was able to reveal only one study by Elisifa (2016) which investigated the social pragmatics proficiency of EFL learners in secondary schools in Kilimanjaro and Dar es Salaam. The results indicated that many participants struggled to make the link between the illocutionary force and the locutionary act, implying a lack of pragmatic proficiency. Additionally, research on interlanguage pragmatics teaching typically concentrates on the effectiveness of teaching and learning results, without examining actual teachers practice and the reasons behind their practices.

This study therefore, aimed at examining the teachers' knowledge and perceptions towards integration of teaching pragmatics in the classroom at Kinondoni Municipality in Tanzania.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Studies have shown that language teaching has been overly concerned with grammar while disregarding the importance of pragmatic aspect of English language. Despite this, the reasons behind this instructional approach have not been adequately investigated. Masrour et al. (2019) and Ishihara & Cohen (2010) both highlight the important role of teachers' knowledge and perception in determining their practices in the classroom. These studies assert that teachers' beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and experiences contribute to their thinking processes and teaching methodology, as well as their instructional, evaluative, and curricular decisions. As a result, the inclusion of pragmatics in the teaching of English as a foreign language is impacted by the knowledge and perceptions of the teacher. It is clear that teachers'

knowledge and perception are a major factor in influencing their classroom practices. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the knowledge and perceptions of EFL teachers in Kinondoni Municipality as contributing factors to the lack of pragmatics instruction in EFL classrooms in Tanzania.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study aimed to examine the teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding the integration of pragmatics teaching in the classroom at Kinondoni Municipality in Tanzania.

Specifically, the study aimed to achieve the following:

- i. Examine teachers' perceptions towards integrating interlanguage pragmatics in the classroom.
- ii. Examine teachers' interlanguage pragmatics knowledge

2. Methods and Respondents

The study was conducted in Kinondoni district in Tanzania, wherein forty English Language teachers from five secondary schools were given questionnaire to complete. The questionnaire was the sole tool for data collection. The sample was chosen purposefully before being randomised; eight EFL teachers were selected from each school. With regard to level of education, 75% had bachelor of education degree, 14% had master's degree in education and only 11% had diploma in education. Most of the respondents has experience of teaching English language for more than five years; where by nine (25.7) have experience of teaching for more than 15 years, nine (25.7) have experience of teaching for 10 years to 15 years and eleven (31.4%) have experience of teaching for 5 to 10 years. Only 17% has less than 5 years' experience of teaching English language to secondary schools. Kinondoni municipal was chosen for its accessibility. The questionnaire was shared to the teachers via WhatsApp, with a link to the Google Form. Thirty-six (90%) of the respondents filled in the questionnaire, while four (10%) did not. Of those who responded, fourteen (38.9%) were male and twenty-two (61.1%) were female. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the data, such as simple tables, frequency and percentages. Qualitative data was analysed thematically. The results were then discussed and finally, recommendations and suggestions were made based on the findings of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

This report presents the findings based on the order of research objectives stated earlier, beginning with perceptions of teachers of the integration of pragmatics in the teaching, then it presents the findings on teachers' knowledge of pragmatics.

3.1 Perceptions of Teachers regarding Teaching Pragmatics

In this section the teachers had to agree or disagree with some statements related to their

perceptions and practices in their teaching of pragmatics or integration of it in their teaching of EFL to secondary schools' students.

Table 1: Teachers' perception about integration of pragmatics in teaching English language in percentage

SN	Teachers' perception	Scale in %					
		1	2	3	4	5	Total
1.	I believe learning English means learning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation	8.3	5.6	2.8	44.4	38	100
2	I think that the knowledge of pragmatics (how to use the language) is as important as the knowledge of Pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary	8.3	2.8	2.8	44.4	41.7	100
3	I rate my own pragmatic competence as very good	5.7	2.9	17.1	62.9	11.4	100
4	The instruction of pragmatic competence should be part of an effective language teaching program	8.6			40	51.4	100
5	I believe pragmatics knowledge should be taught when students reach a certain level of language proficiency	8.3	13.9	5.6	38.9	33.3	100
6	I believe pragmatics should be taught at all levels of language proficiency	8.3	2.8	8.3	50	30.6	100
7	Learners' pragmatic competence should be part of an effective language testing program	5.6	5.6	2.8	47.2	38.9	100
8	I make my students aware of the significance of pragmatic competence in language learning	5.6	5.6	8.3	55.6	25	100
9	I draw my students' attention to pragmatic appropriateness	5.7	8.6	5.7	54.3	25.7	100
10	I correct learners' pragmatic errors systematically	8.8	2.9	8.8	55.9	23.5	100

Scale Key: 1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neither agree no disagree, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree

The survey results from the table 1 indicate that most of the teachers who filled in the questionnaire (82.4%) think that learning English language entails mastering grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Furthermore, 86.1% of respondents also believe that teaching pragmatics is also essential. 72.2% of the respondents stated that their own pragmatic competence was good, signifying that the teachers have adequate knowledge of pragmatics and are competent in this area of language. Moreover, 91.4% of the respondents agreed that pragmatic competence should be included in an effective language teaching programme, and

most of them (72.2%) agreed that pragmatics should be taught at all levels of language learning. In addition, a large majority (72.2%) agreed that pragmatics should be included in language testing programs, and that they normally draw attention to and systematically correct students' pragmatic errors. In sum, the survey results suggest that EFL teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching pragmatics to EFL secondary school learners.

Overall, the survey results indicate that EFL teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching pragmatics to EFL secondary school learners. This suggests that the teachers are aware of the importance of teaching pragmatics, and are motivated to do so. This is important, as it is necessary for teachers to be aware of the importance of pragmatics in order to effectively teach it. The results of Uysal & Bardakci (2014), who explored Tanzanian EFL teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Ivanova (2018), who investigated the teaching of pragmatics in Ruse region in North-East Bulgaria, both concluded that teachers had a positive attitude towards their respective approaches.

3.2 EFL Teachers' Pragmatics Awareness

EFL section presents the results on pragmatics awareness of secondary school English language teachers in Kinondoni districts.

3.2.1 Pragmatics as one of the courses teachers studied during their teacher training programme

The teachers were asked whether pragmatics was one of the courses they studied during their college teacher training programme. Twenty-five (73.5%) of the teachers surveyed indicated that they were taught pragmatics as part of their college teacher - training programme, while nine (26.5%) reported that they were not taught the subject. Additionally, two (5.5%) did not answer the question. This data suggests that a significant number of teachers may lack an understanding of pragmatics, potentially affecting their classroom teaching and leading to an unequal emphasis on pragmatics in the curriculum.

3.2.2 Defining Pragmatics

Out of the thirty-six teachers surveyed, twenty-one (58.3%) had a general understanding of the term pragmatics and were able to provide the basic aspects of the definition of the term. However, eleven (30.5%) provided an irrelevant definition and four (11.1%) of respondents did not attempt the question, suggesting that they were not aware of what pragmatics is.

Overall, the results imply that the majority of the teachers have a general understanding of the term pragmatics, but a significant portion of them did not. This suggests that further education is needed in order for teachers to better understand the concept of pragmatics. Some definitions which were provided by teachers are as follows:

- Refers to language use according to environment or context.
- Is ability to express meaning beyond language rules.
- The skills on how to utilize language in social interaction.

- It deals with practical rather than theoretical aspect. For instance, the learners are supposed to be given time to practice speaking during the learning process.
- Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language effectively in a contextually appropriate fashion. For example: Nonverbal communication, Empathy, active listening.
- Is process of being able to use English language in different aspect.
- Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language effectively.
- Is the ability to express meaning beyond language rules.
- Is a competence that a learner learns practically rather than theoretically.
- Is the ability to use language effectively in practical aspect of human action and thought.

3.2.3 Awareness of Speech Acts

The respondents were asked to name some speech acts/ language functions which students need to acquire in English Language. Of the thirty-six respondents surveyed, twelve (33.3%) were able to list correctly some of the speech acts that students need to acquire in English Language.

Some of the speech acts named were:

- Requests
- Apologies
- Suggestions
- Commands
- Offers
- Warning
- Declaration
- Greeting
- Invitation
- Asking and giving directions
- Promising
- Ordering
- Complaining
- Refusing

- Congratulating

About 52.7% (19 out of 36) of all respondents provided incorrect answers. In addition, 13.8% (5 out of 36) respondents did not provide any answer to this question. It appears that 52.7% of those who gave wrong answers and 13.8% of those who did not even attempt the question could indicate a lack of knowledge in pragmatics or a lack of confidence in their answers.

The results suggest that many teachers lack the necessary expertise or knowledge required to teach pragmatics to EFL students efficiently. It appears that their teachers' training programme may not have included instruction in pragmatics or if included were more theoretical, which could mean that their classroom teaching is not sufficient to equip students with the necessary skills. The findings by Elisifa, (2016) that English language teaching in Tanzania is form focused are confirmed by the results which show a large number of teachers lacking knowledge of pragmatics, indicating their teaching to be grammar focused. Consequently, it is imperative that teachers receive comprehensive preservice and in-service education on aspects of pragmatics teaching in order to meet the needs of their EFL students effectively. The responses from the respondents who gave incorrect answers are as follows.

- Listen, write and speak English
- Interview
- Parts of speech
- Speech writing and public speaking
- Literary analysis, storytelling, public speaking.
- Listen, speak, and read
- Example, different stylistics in English language
- The use of presentation, the use Morning talk, the use Questions and answers
- Tenses, grammar, comprehension, vocabulary
- Example, different stylistics in English language

3.3.4 Effective Ways to Develop Students' Pragmatic Competence

The respondents were asked to identify effective methods for developing students' pragmatic competences. Most of the participants indicated that instruction was a key element in fostering these skills, stressing the importance of practical, hands-on learning with sufficient time allotted to practice. Some of the responses from the teachers include:

- Pragmatics should be taught at all levels of education, especially from grades one to six.
- Students should be given opportunities to talk more, either in the class or out of the class
- Practical learning in the really learners' environment and use of different interactive

methods and techniques.

- It is important to make students aware that words can perform different functions. When we speak, we use words with grammatical structure, but these utterances can perform different actions depending on the context, such as performing a marriage ceremony or firing a person from work.
- The most effective ways to improve pragmatics skills include: practicing the target language by giving learners opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, receiving constructive feedback, and observing linguistic input.
- Use English language as a basic means of communication in the class
- Allowing the learner to practice the targeted language and demonstrate their skills
- Also, by providing more time for student responses and allow them to engage in conversation and discussion

3.2.5 Difficulties Faced when Teaching Pragmatic Competences

The respondents were asked to name the difficulties they face while teaching pragmatics, to which they responded with various answers. The majority of them identified a lack of teaching resources, such as books, as their primary difficulty. Additionally, they noted that the effect of mother tongue and students lack of sufficient knowledge in grammar were also major reasons for their setback in teaching pragmatics. Time constraints were also cited as a factor for difficulty in teaching pragmatics. The responses from the teachers were as follows:

- Some students are not willing to participate in speaking and they are also shy
- Learners lack appropriate vocabularies to use.
- lack of equipment and nature of the class
- Pronunciation error, and problem of mother tongue language
- Failure to respond to questions and answers.
- Students hate pragmatics
- Students believe that learning pragmatics knowledge is too difficult for them.
- Lack of teaching materials, e.g., videos, books etc.
- Limitations of time during class session or periods
- Cultural differences and low level of student's grammatical competence

3.2.6 The Serious Error between Grammatical and Pragmatics

The respondents were also asked to name the error which they think is more serious between pragmatics and grammatical errors.

The majority of the respondents (61%) indicated that they believe that grammatical errors are

more serious than pragmatic errors. Additionally, 30.5% of the teachers believed that pragmatic errors are more serious. This demonstrates that most teachers prioritize grammar when teaching language.

When asked to explain why they think one type of error is more serious than the other, the responses were varied. Some stated that grammar is the most important element of language, and that their students have more difficulty with grammar than with other aspects of language. Upon closer examination of the responses, it shows that many of the respondents equate grammar with language itself. The responses from the teachers are as follows:

- English is our third language, so most of us are not proficient in the language
- Most learners have poor grammar backgrounds
- Students aren't serious in language learning
- Most of the students prefer to use Kiswahili than English
- Many students face difficulties in learning grammar rather than learning pragmatic
- Because we need pragmatic to understand how language is used in a specific context
- Because pragmatic helps to understand how language is used in a specific context
- Because most of schools have no enough materials, many students having poor English foundation due to frequent change of syllabus.

The survey results indicate that most teachers have a limited understanding of pragmatics, unable to name a single speech act and deeming grammatical errors to be more serious than pragmatic errors. The findings reveal a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions, knowledge and priorities when it comes to teaching grammar and pragmatics. Despite having a positive attitude towards teaching pragmatics, teachers tend to view grammatical errors as more severe than pragmatic errors. This discrepancy between their perception and practice reinforces the notion that teachers often prioritize grammar over pragmatics when teaching language, despite claiming to understand the importance of pragmatics. This contradiction between belief and practice was also observed in a study by Ndulila & Msuya (2017), which examined Tanzanian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The study found that, while teachers reported a positive attitude towards CLT, they did not implement it in their classrooms. It is clear that teachers need to be more cognizant of the significance of pragmatics in language learning, and strive to incorporate it into their teaching in order to effectively educate their students.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the survey has provided valuable insight into the perspectives of teachers on language learning. It has highlighted that, majority of the teachers have a positive attitude towards integration of pragmatics teaching, and felt confident in their ability to incorporate it into their teaching.

Results further indicate that secondary school teachers' pragmatics knowledge in Kinondoni municipality is limited. This has implications for the quality of English language teaching and learning in the schools. There is a need for teachers to incorporate pragmatics knowledge in their teaching and for teachers training institutions to include pragmatics as an important element of pre-service teachers' training. This will enable teachers to be better prepared to use and teach pragmatics in their classrooms.

5. Recommendation

The results of the study emphasize the need for more focus on and the integration of pragmatics in the Tanzania EFL teachers' education and in-service training. The curriculum should be restructured to include firm foundations in pragmatics. This should include activities that enable the teachers to understand how to use the language in context. Furthermore, the results suggest that there is a need for further training and development of in-service teachers in order to improve their knowledge of pragmatics. This will give them a better understanding of the language and help them to teach more effectively.

The teachers in Tanzania should give more attention to the teaching of pragmatics in order to improve students' communicative competence. Teaching pragmatics should be seen as an important aspect of language learning, in addition to grammar. Teachers should be encouraged to incorporate pragmatics into the classroom and should provide students with opportunities to practice using and understanding pragmatics.

Overall, the respondents identified several challenges that they faced while teaching pragmatics, such as a lack of teaching resources, the effect of mother tongue, and time constraints. These difficulties can be addressed by providing teachers with resources to help them teach pragmatics, such as books and online courses. Additionally, teachers should be given adequate time to study and prepare for their classes. Teachers should also be provided with more information on grammar and its application in teaching pragmatics. Finally, schools and other educational institutions should also give importance to the teaching of pragmatics.

If a more comprehensive understanding of the pragmatic knowledge of teachers in Tanzania is desired, a different study could be conducted that expands its scope. This will help to cover a wider area and explore more specific aspects of pragmatics. The current study has limited scope which only looked at a small sample of teachers in Kinondoni municipal and a few general aspects of pragmatics such as defining and listing speech acts.

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