Developing Pragmatic Competence Through Project-Based Learning: Insights from Indonesian EFL Students' Interactions with Foreign Tourists

Mengembangkan Kompetensi Pragmatik melalui Project-Based Learning: Temuan dari Interaksi Siswa EFL Indonesia dengan Turis Asing

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Abstract
Developing pragmatic competence is essential for EFL learners, especially in contexts where real communication opportunities are limited. This study investigates how Project-Based Learning (PBL) supports the development of pragmatic competence among Indonesian EFL students during real-life speaking interactions with foreign tourists at Double Six Beach, Bali. The project activity focused on the theme *"Getting to Know Each Other."* Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study analyzed speech acts produced by two learner groups: kids (9–12 years old) and teenagers (14–16 years old). Data were collected from video recordings of student–tourist interactions and examined using Searle's (1976) speech act taxonomy and Hymes' (1972) notion of pragmatic competence. Findings show that both groups were able to perform a range of speech acts, including greetings, asking for information, sharing personal details, expressing gratitude, and managing conversational turns. Overall, the study shows that Project-Based Learning provides a useful way to develop pragmatic competence by involving students in meaningful and authentic communication outside the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the ability to communicate effectively goes beyond grammatical accuracy. It is expected to help students communicate effectively, not necessarily through grammatically correct language use. Learners must also know how to use language correctly in different social situations. The ability to use language in a variety of social context is called as pragmatic competence (Hymes, 1972). Pragmatic competence enables learners to choose the right expressions, tone, and level of politeness according to context and their addressees. However, many EFL learners, particularly in Indonesia, have limited opportunities to use English in real situation outside the classroom.

To address this gap, Project-Based Learning (PBL) is used to support the learning process that emphasizes learning through real-life tasks. According to Thomas (2000), Project-Based Learning (PBL) involves students in meaningful projects that need authentic use of language to solve problems, collaborate, and communicate. This study focuses on how Project-Based Learning (PBL) can help Indonesian EFL students develop their pragmatic competence through real speaking practice with foreign tourists. Previous research has shown that Project-Based Learning (PBL) can improve students' communication skills. Beckett and Slater (2005) demonstrated that Project-Based

Learning (PBL) supports the integration of language skills and encourages the use of English in real situation. Similarly, Stoller (2006) found that PBL helps students use language for real-world purposes, making their communication more natural and contextual. Besides, Taguchi (2011) emphasized that real interactions are crucial for developing pragmatic skills, while Nguyen (2013) found that learners who participated in real-world speaking tasks gained a better understanding of speech acts and politeness strategies. In the Indonesian context, studies by Widodo (2016) and Yanti & Suherdi (2020) showed that contextual tasks such as role-playing, community interactions, and project-based activities can help EFL learners become more confident and accurate in their language use.

This study is grounded in the idea that effective communication is not only about using correct grammar, but also about understanding how language works in real social situations. Hymes (1972) explains this through the concept of communicative competence, which highlights the importance of choosing appropriate expressions, levels of politeness, and conversational strategies based on who we are speaking to and why. To examine how learners actually perform communication, this study uses Searle's (1976) Speech Act Theory, which divided into representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. This framework helps identify the kinds of communicative moves students make during interaction. These linguistic perspectives connect well with Project-Based Learning (Thomas, 2000; Beckett & Slater, 2005; Stoller, 2006), which emphasizes learning through meaningful, real-world experiences.

In PBL, students are encouraged to communicate for authentic purposes, negotiate meaning, and respond to unexpected conversational turns. By interacting directly with foreign tourists, learners are placed in situations that naturally require them to use pragmatic skills, such as initiating conversations, managing turns, and expressing friendliness. Therefore, combining communicative competence, speech act theory, and PBL provides a strong foundation for exploring how authentic projects can support the development of pragmatic competence in Indonesian EFL learners.

Then, this study explores how Project-Based Learning can help the development of pragmatic competence among Indonesian EFL students by giving them opportunities to do direct communication with foreign tourists. The project, carried out at Double Six Beach in Bali, encouraged learners to have natural conversations on the topic *"Getting to Know Each Other."* The purpose of the study is to identify the types of speech act used by learners and to examine how Project-Based Learning supports the development of pragmatic competence during these real communication project.

METHODS

The participants were two groups of EFL students from an English course in Bali, Indonesia. The first group consisted of three children (ages 9–12) and the second group consisted of two teenagers (ages 14–16). Both groups participated in a Project-Based Speaking Practice activity held at Double Six Beach, Seminyak, where they had communication with foreign tourists.The study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through video recordings of students' conversations during the speaking practice project. The activity topic was *"Getting to Know Each Other."* Students were encouraged to introduce themselves, ask and answer questions, and exchange information naturally. The transcribed data were analyzed using Searle's (1976) Speech Act Theory to identify speech act types (representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives) and Hymes' (1972) model of communicative competence, focusing on the pragmatic aspect; language appropriateness based on context, participants, and purpose of communication.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that Project-Based Learning provided an effective context for the development of students' pragmatic competence. Through real interactions with foreign

tourists, learners produced various speech acts and demonstrated the ability to use language appropriately according to context, as explained in Searle's (1976) and Hymes' (1972) frameworks. The table of the findings will be shown below:

Table 1. Types of Speech Act Found in the Students' Conversation

Speech Act Type	Kids (9–12)	Teenagers (14–16)
Greeting	"Hello, we are students from BSD after school club. Today, we want to practice our English. Do you have time?"	"How are you, sir?" Are you busy?
Directive	"Do you like Balinese culture?"	"Can we have your name?"
Representative	"My hobby is dancing."	"My favorite place is Kuta Beach."
Expressive	"Thank you!"	"Nice to meet you."
Commissive	"This is a gift for you." (give a keychain)	"We have something for you." (give a keychain)
Discourse Management	"My name is Dibya, this is my friends, Juna and Tama. We have questions for you."	"Now, we have questions for you."
Strategic Competence	"I have noodles."	"Favorite place?"

Table 2. Pragmatic Competence Found in the Students' Conversation

Pragmatic Competence	Kids (9–12)	Teenagers (14–16)
Students showed polite interaction and awareness of social context.	"Hello, we are students from BSD after school club. Today, we want to practice our English. Do you have time?"	"How are you, sir?" Are you busy?
Students asked questions politely to get information.	"Do you like Balinese culture?"	"Can we have your name?"
Students shared personal information, expressing facts and preferences appropriately in social context.	"My hobby is dancing."	"My favorite place is Kuta Beach."
Students expressed gratitude and friendliness, reflecting social awareness and politeness strategies.	"Thank you!"	"Nice to meet you."
Kids demonstrated intention to perform kind acts to maintain positive social relations.	"This is a gift for you." (give the keychain to the guest)	"We have something for you." (give the keychain)
Students managed conversation flow and turn-taking	"My name is Dibya, this is my friends, Juna and Tama. We have questions for you."	"Now, we have questions for you."
Students clarified meaning and repaired breakdowns, showing flexibility and communication strategies.	"I have noodles."	"Favorite place?"

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings shows that Project-Based Learning help students develop their pragmatic competence by encouraging them to use different speech acts during real-life communication.

1. PBL Encourages Real-Life Communication

Project-Based Learning created a real communicative environment where students used English with real speakers. This aligns with Hymes' (1972) idea that communicative competence develops when learners use language appropriately in real social situations, not only in controlled classroom tasks. Through the *Getting to Know Each Other* project, students practiced initiating conversations, asking questions, and responding in context. These real-life interactions allowed them to adjust their language based on participants and situation, demonstrating the pragmatic competence as defined by Hymes.

2. Speech Acts in Real Interactions

Students used several types of speech acts, such as representatives, directives, expressives, and commissives which are follow Searle's (1976) categories. Their spontaneous use of these speech acts shows that PBL created natural opportunities for them to use language in real situations. Through these real interactions, students were able to connect classroom learning with actual communication, helping them use speech acts more effectively.

3. Pragmatic Competence in Practice

Students were able to use language appropriately based on the setting, the people they interacted with, and the social situation, which reflects Hymes' (1972) components of communicative competence. They used polite greetings, asked relevant questions, and managed conversations through turn-taking. These behaviors show the development of pragmatic competence, as students were not only using correct English forms but also applying the language in appropriate ways, in line with Hymes' model.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Project-Based Learning is effective for developing pragmatic competence among Indonesian EFL students. Through real communication with foreign tourists, students naturally practiced different speech acts. The interaction encouraged them to adjust their language, manage conversations, and express themselves more confidently. Overall, Project-Based Learning helped connect classroom learning with real communication, allowing students to use English meaningfully and appropriately in real situations.

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