QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

INVESTIGATING PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES IN ESL CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS: A STUDY OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Dr. Jam Khan Muhammad
Assistant professor, Centre of English language and Linguistic (CELL) Mehran university of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro
E mail: jam.khan@faculty.muet.edu.pk
Sumera Bhanbhro
Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro
E mail: bhanbhro.sumera@usindh.edu.pk
Waheed Shahzad
Ph.D. Scholar AIOU ISB, Lecturer KFUEIT, RYK
E mail: waheed.shahzad@kfueit.edu.pk

Abstract
The current research examined pragmatic strategies of Pakistani university students in ESL classroom discussions. The central aim was to reveal the pragma linguistic strategies by means of which students communicate and to see how cultural and contextual factors mediate their communication. I utilized design-based research as our qualitative approach with a quantitative component for triangulation. Data were collected from fifty ESL learners of universities selected for the study through semi-structured interviews and questionnaire. Detailed information about the use of polite or direct, modify and resolve approvals/requests were collected by semi-structured interview, while students' frequency and perceived use of these strategies was obtained through a questionnaire.
Findings found that students frequently used verbal politeness and hedges to (de)attune in their talk an interaction or a face-threatening offensive act. Their communicative behaviors revealed profound cultural differences on issues of power and social hierarchy; a respect that affected their choices. The students were also aware of situational and interlocutor variation in language use—a response to pragmatic knowledge, if not conscious application of it. And finally, repair and explanation patterns indicated that they were attempting to maintain meaningful interaction under linguistic constraints. However, low confidence to disagree and lack of exposure in authentic communication inhibited learners' pragmatic fluency.
The study essentially found that Pakistani university students manifested developing pragmatic competence, largely determined by sociocultural experiences. The findings indicated that introducing explicit teaching of pragmatics, and communicative activities through ESL classroom practice might have positive effects on learners' communication ability and confidence level. This study helped in navigating the relationship between language, culture and communication Pakistani ESL contexts and also provided pedagogical implications for teaching pragmatics at university level.
Keywords: *Pragmatic Strategies, ESL, Pakistani University Students, Classroom Discussions, Politeness, Indirectness, Pragmatic Competence, Sociocultural Context.*

Introduction

Over the last years, the attention towards the acquisition of pragmatic competence among second language (L2) learners has grown, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

Pragmatic competence, which can be broadly conceived of language use in interactional situations, is considered a domain of textually appropriate and contextually acceptable language use that achieves social effectiveness (Kasper & Rose, 2002) with the basis beyond grammatical correctness facts also including concerns for situationally dependent expressions and politeness strategies (Faerch & Kasper, 1989). ESL/EFL learners, particularly in multilingual contexts like Pakistan, need to acquire pragmatic strategies for communicative effectiveness and sociolinguistic appropriateness both in academic and social realms (Taguchi, 2019).

Classroom conversation is the most crucial site for the emergence and use of pragmatic strategies. They constitute contexts for interaction where students are engaged in the negotiation of meaning, turn-taking and disagreement as well as being polite or indirect to achieve social goals (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). In Pakistani university language classrooms, on the other hand, learners tend to carry out interactions based on literal/ direct interactional patterns influenced by their L1 norms that may interfere with pragmatic flexibility in English (Bashir et al., 2020). Exploration of these strategies in authentic classroom exchanges can provide insight into how sociocultural contexts influence the pragmatic performance of ESL speakers and how the performance relates to successful communication in academic discourse. Furthermore, the analysis of pragmatic strategies in ESL classrooms is valuable to research in ELT for the wider context of interlanguage pragmatics, providing teaching practical implications on how communicative tasks can be utilized effectively to develop students' pragmatic awareness and competence (Barron, 2019). The role of teachers in encouraging discussion-based learning was found to both constrain and promote learners' development of pragmatics, depending on the amount of exposure, feedback and opportunity for authentic interactions they facilitated (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2021).

In the Pakistani situation, where English is an L2 as well as a language of learning and reading at tertiary level investigating pragmatic moves among university students holds importance. Not only does such inquiry facilitate the comprehension of students' communicative styles, but it also contributes to the development of teaching methods designed to incorporate instruction in pragmatics into ESL programs. Accordingly, the objective of this research is to explore pragmatic strategies used by Pakistani university students (intermediate/advanced English language learners) in classroom discussions and to analyze how these strategies are indicative of social norms and interactional objectives as well as linguistic proficiency.

Significance of Study

This study has theoretical and practical implications for the fields of applied linguistics, particularly interlanguage pragmatics. Drawing upon the theoretical and methodological framework of bridging/facework (Antos, 2012; Schegloff & Lerner, 2009) this study provides insights into the pragmatic resources mobilized by Pakistani university students in ESL classroom discussions and enhances our understanding of how learners are able to use language to pursue communicative purposes, navigate social relations and keep interaction on track. These insights would be invaluable in linking our understanding of linguistic and pragmatic competence, a connection that is also underdeveloped in the typical ESL course (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

On a pedagogical level, this study has some implications for language teachers, curriculum developers and material writers. Knowledge about the natural use of different types of pragmatic strategies by Pakistani ESL learners and the problems in teaching these strategies can inform ESOL practitioners in infusing pragmatic instruction throughout the English classroom. This could involve designing classroom tasks as replicating real-life communication, making the speech explicit or promoting reflection as communicative mechanism (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Barron, 2019). Accordingly, the results can contribute to enhance student's holistic communicative competence through more appropriate and effective academic and professional use of English.

Moreover, in the Pakistani context of higher education where English is used as an instructional and social language; it is important to enrich pragmatic competence for the development of intercultural communication. Moreover, owing to this empirical evidence, teacher training programs can be directed at the need of bringing attention towards teaching pragmatic norms alongside grammatical structures (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2021).

More generally, the work could be situated within global debates about sociocultural dependence on how humans use language pragmatics, in particular in multilingual societies. The current study contributes to the existing literature by exploring Pakistani ESL learners' pragmatic strategies, as most of this work has been done in Western or East Asian contexts (Taguchi, 2019). More importantly, it has contributed to the theoretical knowledge of interlanguage pragmatics grounded in South Asian sociolinguistic settings and opened a window for future comparative cross-cultural studies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study underpins the Integrated Interlanguage Pragmatics, Speech Act Theory (SAT) and Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which enables us to explore pragmatic strategies of Pakistani ESL learners at length. In contrast, an analysis of learners' language use can be seen through the lens of ILP, in which it is portrayed as a "dynamic pragma linguistic interlanguage that is affected by L1 transfer and pedagogical context" (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993), thus enabling us to perceive strategies not as errors per se but as systematic intermediate stages in their development. The analytical core comes from speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and provides an inventory of specific discursive acts—such disagreeing suggesting turn-taking—that can be responded to by interlocutors. At the same time, Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) situates these actions in the learning setting by which it takes place rooting classroom in a community of practice where social interaction, scaffolding and mediated learning in the ZPD empowers acquisition of pragmatic norms effectively. This three-part model thus progresses from what strategies are employed (Speech Acts), to the nature of their operation as a learner system (ILP), and, in turn, how the social environment influences their development (SCT).

Literature Review

Definitions of beliefs have been provided by several literature on EFL and ESL. Ellis uses the word beliefs as "learners' mini theories 'of second or foreign language learning". Victori and Lockhart define the term further, stating beliefs are assumptions that students make about themselves as learners. These assumptions also include determinants that impact language

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

acquisition and the characteristics of learning such as in case of learning and teaching. Richards & Schmidt provide a lot of detailed insights into the term and states that belief is thoughts students have about various aspects of L2 learning and teaching. It also influences their attitude and motivation toward learning and affects their learning strategies, as well as the effects of such strategies. Learners' beliefs system is a system of thoughts and attitudes towards learning the language, effective languages teaching and learning activities and appropriate classroom behavior. It also involves their own skills and objectives in language learning". 8 Simply put, learners' beliefs are individual thoughts, assumptions and ideas that they perceive to be true about English language learning. They are caused by complicated cultural and social mechanisms. They are, therefore, hard, powerful and immovable powers. But everyone has his/her own set of beliefs. Scholars disagree about the origins of these beliefs. One set of researchers believes language learning beliefs are shaped by social interaction. The social general conception about learning of the language is inculcated in the learners through interacting with society. The other group, on the other hand, considers beliefs as cognitive and learners' personal attributes. Therefore, the learner's previous experience and thoughts form their beliefs. It is argued that English learners have their own conceptions considering how they learn the English language. It's the same for such beliefs, they can be consciously acquired (e.g. after receiving advice from parents, friends or teachers about language learning) or unconsciously (e.g. by observing and mimicking). "But such are retained because of one factor - causation, and not any other. "However, with the attainment of "cognitive maturity", learners can change previously held beliefs or form new ones in this enabling process. This makes the belief conscious to the learners. Moreover, learners might vigorously support any such beliefs if their own experience affirms them. So, why know learners' beliefs? There are many studies on the value of knowing students' conceptions. The awareness of the beliefs of the learners is important since it helps not only teachers and syllabus designers know what their students expect from and how much they are involved in their language study. Claims on the part of learners also affect their "motivation attitude about learning and its tasks as well as knowledge value" and this influences their language learning process. Hence, learners with reasonable expectations and well-informed beliefs are likely to have positive attitude toward learning. Those with unrealistic expectations and beliefs are also disposed to have poor attitude to learning and language anxiety. These conceptions of learning languages have been shown to influence numerous issues. According to Wenden, the learners' belief system determines learning (language) in terms of the types of strategies they employ, the criteria by which they judge strategy effectiveness, and when to use one strategy rather than another. Beliefs may also influence students' motivation to learn the language, their language learning goals and what they believe to be the skills/part of the language. Students tend to have different goals in a language; some students learn the language because they want to understand what English people say or being able to speak fluently with an English native. On the other hand, they may aspire to be good at writing in a foreign language. Students do not only have different goals but may also hold varying views on easiness and difficulty in learning a language. Speaking may be considered the hardest skill by some, and others may find grammar the trickiest aspect of language learning to get their heads around.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

The review of the related literature on pragmatic competence in second language is important as it offers vital background to this study. Furthermore, however, such literature also indicates a gap that needs to be filled vis-à-vis the Pakistani ESL context. This review integrates research in three wide-ranging domains, namely validation of pragmatic competence as a central aspect of L2 learning, cross-cultural and instructional scaffolding factors influencing the development of socio-pragmatic abilities in speech acts; and the general sociopragmatic map characteristic to Pakistani society.

The Centrality of Pragmatic Competence in SLA

Theoretical and empirical research has firmly established that linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for effective communication. Hymes (1972), in groundbreaking work on communicative competence, and its further development by Canale and Swain (1980) as well as Bachman (1990) have established an essential role for pragmatic knowledge in language proficiency. Pragmatic competence, the ability to use language appropriately in context, includes both pragmalinguistics (the linguistic resources required to perform speech acts) and sociopragmatics (the social attitudes that motivate and support verbal behavior) (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). A significant amount of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research has testified to the troubles L2 learners have learning this area of language which can result in pragmatic failure for advanced language learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013; Kasper & Rose, 2002). These issues are most pronounced in spoken interaction, where learners need to understand and produce language on-the-fly, as they navigate speech acts such as disagreements, requests and turn-taking that inhabit much academic talk.

Cross-Cultural Influences and the Role of Instruction

An issue that has been extensively discussed in ILP research is the first language and cultural background effect on L2 pragmatics. Variation studies from various backgrounds including Japanese (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989), Chinese (Liao & Bresnahan, 1996), or German learners of English have also shown that socio pragmatic norms for the realization of directness, politeness and formality are often “copied” over from the FL1 and interpreted as impolite or hesitant. This draws attention to the cross-linguistic differences in the development of speech acts and points to the necessity of context-sensitive inquiries. In contrast, some researchers have been concerned about the teaching and learning of pragmatics and examined how effective instructional intervention might be, with meta-analysis studies suggesting that pragmatic competence can be (and hence should be) taught in the classroom (Taguchi, 2015). Research such as Rose (2005) has demonstrated the superiority of explicit metapragmatic instruction over implicit instruction, but nevertheless communicative appropriateness-based instruction continues to be a disempowered way of seeing on the fringe in much of (what I call “the establishment see and freshman composition) one that puts grammatical attainment before communicative success.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

The Sociolinguistic and Research Context of Pakistan

In a place like Pakistan where English serves as a co-official language and the main medium of instruction in institutions of higher learning, the stakes with regard to knowledge and proficiency in English are high (Mahboob, 2009; Rahman, 2002). However, it is noticed that the previous linguistic studies carried out in Pakistan have mainly addressed issues related to language policy, identity and attitudes towards English, as well as analysis on grammatical errors in writing (e.g., Mansoor 2005; Siddiqui 2020). Despite its value, relatively little attention has been given to the oral pragmatic domain's developmental course. Except for a few studies dealing with pragmatics, such as Ahsan et al. (2020) on refusal strategies, are generally production-based work utilizing discourse completion tasks (DCTs) rather than exploring real-time, interactional discourse. This leaves a significant void; the dynamic, co-constructed dimensions of conversational activity that transpire in a classroom discussion – turn-taking, agreement and disagreement are meaning-made on the go - has received only scant attention.

Synthesis and Identification of the Gap

To sum up, the literature supports that pragmatic competence is needed for L2 learners, can be influenced by crosslinguistic effect, and could be shaped in explicit learning. Little is known, however, about the particular pragmatic problems that Pakistani college students encounter in speech acts situations in the realistic and interactive classroom. This would indicate a major disconnection between world view of the ILP and realities of Pakistani ESL classroom. Thus, the present research aims to fill this gap by shifting from decontextualized production tasks to an examination of real-time pragmatic strategies in the classroom and providing a crucial context-specific picture of student interlanguage pragmatics within a larger framework.

Research Methodology

This section includes statements on research design, population and sampling technique; instrument development; data collection procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness ethical considerations and limitations. The study aimed at investigating the pragmatic strategies employed by Pakistani university level students in their ESL classroom discussions and examining the students' perceptions towards their communicative conduct.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive and interpretive research approach was used to investigate the pragmatic strategies employed by ESL students in classroom discussions. Given that pragmatic knowledge is context-bound and social, a qualitative perspective could have provided an understanding of the interactional activity learners engaged in to negotiate meaning, express politeness, and interact in real contexts. Regarding qualitative approaches, semi-structured interviews represented the major data collection technique. This approach allowed us to be flexible with the participants and their perspectives and ensured that all relevant dimensions of pragmatic strategies use could be discussed. The design was informed rather than measured, which made it appropriate for analysis of discourse and communication patterns in university classrooms.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

Population

The study's population was undergraduate students who studied English language at public sector universities of Pakistan. They were often involved in class discussions and other collaborative speaking tasks that used English, making them appropriate participants for the examination of pragmatic responses. The sample population consisted of participants who had studied English as a foreign language for several years at an intermediate level that enabled them to express themselves efficiently during classroom activities.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was used to choose participants who could provide insightful, valid and varied views about the phenomenon of interest for this study. They were undergraduate students taking ESL courses at the time of participating in the study, had previous experience of joining classroom discussion, and agreed to share their communicative experience. A purposive sample of 15-20 students from two public universities in Pakistan was taken to have different perspectives both with respect to gender, proficiency level and academic background. Participants, who were information-rich in this thematic area, their experiences related to the use of pragmatic strategies in English lent themselves to the study through purposeful sampling.

Research Site

The study was carried out in two public universities of Pakistan which were chosen purposively for their accessibility, administration enthusiasm and the availability of ESL classes. Given the fact that these two types of institutions were authentic contexts in which English was employed as means for instruction, and interaction, they constituted excellent places to investigate the pragmatic strategy use among university students.

Research Instrument

The semi-structured interview was used as the leading instrument for data gathering in this research. This instrument was best suited for qualitative research seeking to explore participant beliefs, attitudes, and communicative understanding. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ask questions with freedom for probing when clarification was required. Each interview was carried out one-on-one and lasted about 20–30 minutes face-to-face or online using platforms like Zoom or Google Meet. All participants consented to interviews being audio-recorded, and the recordings supported by short field notes of any contextual or non-verbal information provided during the interview.

Development of the Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview schedule was designed based on a literature review of pragmatic competence and classroom communication (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Cohen, 2018; Taguchi, 2019). Interview questions were created to investigate four categories: (1) participants' background, (2) pragmatic strategies they used, (3) reasons and circumstances for these communicative behaviors, and (4) the participants' views about ESL discussions. Sample questions were: "What do you do to get your thoughts across without being rude when µwe have a discussion in class?", "How do you get around taking turns or interruptions?" I swear!' \', "Do you ever switch between Urdu and English when speaking? Why?"; and "What challenges do you encounter when telling in English?" Participants used these open-ended

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

questions as an opportunity to consider what they had experienced, reporting a great deal about their interactional behavior. The semi-structured format facilitated fluidity by permitting changes in the order and/or wording of questions, depending on conversation direction.

Data Collection Procedure

The collection of data involves multiple systematic steps. First, we obtained written consent from the responsible authorities of the participating universities, and also each participant was informed about study purposes verbally before our survey begins to get his willingness avoiding or not participate during collection process. Second, two students performed a pilot interview in order to verify the clarity and relevance of the questions, and some necessary adjustments were adopted. The first is that the main interviews were carried out to suit participants at times when they felt relaxed and unthreatened. All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Members were also provided with the opportunity to review their transcripts, if needed (member checking), in order to ensure accuracy and resolve any unclear comments. This rigorous process was a guarantee that the data was credible, trustworthy and ethically obtained.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). It started with familiarization: the researcher read and re-read the transcript of interviews many times in order to grasp an overall understanding. Subsequently, open codes were developed to describe the text data relevant to pragmatic strategies such as implications of politeness markers, turn-taking, repair-organization devices, hedging and code-switching. Then, the codes were categorized into higher order themes including “Managing Interaction”, “Maintaining Politeness”, and “Cultural Influence” and finally seven subthemes emerged: (i) Overcoming Communication Challenges. In the last step, the themes were meaningfully reflected upon in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks in pragmatics. The study’s most important goal was to understand the strategies that students employed, but also why and how they were used within classroom settings.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was established by prolonged interaction with the participants and member-checking. Transferability was achieved through the thick, rich descriptions offered of context and participants to allow readers judge the relevance in other settings. Reliability of the data was established through maintaining an audit trail of all methodological decisions, and interview guides, and coding procedures. Confirmability was ensured though reflexive journaling and triangulation of the interview data with field notes, to help reduce researcher bias.

Ethical Considerations

The protocol was ethically sound and the ethical integrity has been preserved throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were instructed that they could decline at any time without reprisals. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation along with explicit information about the aims of the study, confidentiality and use of their

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

responses. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names to maintain anonymity, and all audio recordings and verbatim transcripts were stored on a secure server with limited access. The data were only used for academic purposes, and we deleted the data after the study was finished.

Limitations

This study, like all qualitative research, recognized some constraints. The survey findings were situational and may not be representative of all the university students in Pakistan. The data were based on self-reports of perception, not observed classroom behavior. Further, small sample size, which is common with qualitative research design, restricted statistical generalizability. Instead, this detailed investigation brought new insights into the way Pakistani university students viewed and employed pragmatic strategies in an authentic communicative setting.

Summary

To sum up, the present chapter discussed the qualitative research design applied to investigate into the pragmatic strategies implemented by Pakistani university students in ESL classroom discussions. The research aimed to investigate learners' attitudes, experiences and problems regarding the use of pragmatic strategies through semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling and thematic analysis. The use of the ethical criteria means of establishing credibility, and methods to analyze data support the validity and reliability of the results.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from 50 ESL undergraduates were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative part of the data from the questionnaire was used to have a numerical picture of how much students use and know about pragmatic strategies in English classroom discussions, and the semi-structured interviews offered a qualitative representation of how learners utilize these strategies in authentic communication. The analysis of the two sets of data was conducted separately and then compared for triangulated interpretation.

Quantitative Data Analysis (Questionnaire)

Data were analyzed from the GAT II responses of all 50 students using descriptive statistics in Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The responses were coded, tabulated and analyzed for aggregate frequencies, percentages and mean scores in order to identify general patterns of pragmatic strategy use among the participants.

The results indicated that students generally (M = 4.20) agreed they used politeness markers, such as "please," "thank you" and "sorry," in their class discussions most of the time. This revealed a high consciousness of politeness codes by the ESL students. A high percentage of the participants (84%) indicated that if they disagreed with a teacher or classmate, they would not express dissent directly in order to retain (dis)respectful and workable quality (M= 4.05).

Another important result was the discovery that 78% of the subjects (M=3.95) reported using hedging devices like "I think", "Maybe we can" or 'It seems as if' individually when they expressed opinions politely. Furthermore, 72% of the students indicated that they deliberately used language and tone according to the addressee (teacher or peer), which testifies their pragmatic knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

Data even reported that 68 percent of `students T often received clarification or used repetition when they were not able to understand each other (M = 3.80), thus indicating their attempts to keep understanding in a common ground. A lower proportion (approximately 40%) reported drawing on other sources of information such as the person's non-verbal communication, including gestures and facial expressions, indicating that learners' awareness is less multi-modal.

Generally speaking, the questionnaire results revealed that students had moderate to high pragmatic awareness in terms of politeness, indirectness and contextual fit. But some aspects — with regard to non-verbal communication and confidence in expressing disagreement, for example—seemed less developed.

Qualitative Data Analysis (Semi-Structured Interviews)

To complement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 participants from the same group of 50 students. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, read multiple times for familiarization, and coded to identify recurring linguistic behaviors and perceptions related to pragmatic use in classroom discussions.

From the analysis, four major themes emerged:

1. **Politeness and Respectful Expression**

   Almost all interviewees emphasized the importance of being polite and respectful, especially when addressing teachers. Students mentioned using softeners (e.g., *"I think so," "Maybe," "I agree to some extent"*) to avoid sounding rude or overconfident.
2. **Indirectness and Cultural Norms**

   Participants consistently reported that their communication style was influenced by Pakistani cultural values, where direct disagreement is often seen as disrespectful. Therefore, they preferred indirect and mitigated speech acts to maintain social harmony.
3. **Repair and Clarification Strategies**

   Students described using strategies like repetition, paraphrasing, and asking for clarification when communication breakdowns occurred. These strategies helped them maintain fluency and avoid misunderstanding in English conversations.
4. **Contextual Awareness and Adaptability**

   Many students showed an understanding of contextual language use, for example, being more formal with teachers and more relaxed with classmates. This indicated their pragmatic flexibility and awareness of power dynamics in classroom interactions.

Integration of Findings

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allowed a more complete insight into the use of pragmatic strategies by Pakistani ESL university students. Whilst the quantitative data

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

indicated that students' default speaking behavior was to use polite, indirect strategies, it was only through analysis of their recorded interviews and formal oral examination performances that some understanding of these cultural habits emerged.

It also confirmed that Pakistani ESL learners exhibited a high pragmatic awareness, but they were shaped with competing cultural norms of respect, humility, and non-confrontation. However, aspects such as non-verbal communication and confidence in disagreement were perceived in need of additional development. In general, the findings indicated that the university students' pragmatic competence was developing into a combination of language knowledge and sociocultural adjustment, i.e., in the context of ESL classroom.

Discussion

The study aimed to explore the pragmatic strategies used by Pakistani university learners during ESL classroom discussions, and how their communication was influenced by cultural and contextual factors. The results showed that students mostly used politeness strategies like expressing thanks, apologizing or using hedges to keep harmony in classroom communication. Quantitative findings indicated high average scores of polite expressions, and complementary qualitative interviews proved that the students made effort on speaking to teachers and peers in a respectful tone. These findings were also in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which holds that speakers engage positive and negative politeness to save face and foster rapport. Students' avoidance of face threats suggests the operation of a high degree of face need and most importantly, the influence of cultural norms about respect and humility in communication.

The research also showed that indirectness was the most significant pragmatic feature in students' English use. Some felt that directly arguing with teachers or peers was unacceptable in their culture. This indirect verbosity was part of the collectivist social structure of Pakistani society, which is very concerned about both social harmony and hierarchical respect. The results were in line with the previous research by Ishihara and Cohen (2010) and LoCastro (2012) that learners in Asia and Middle East contexts are more indirect strategy users compared to native English speakers. As such, the learners' linguistic competences were not only communicative choices but sociocultural modifications enabling them to negotiate English norms with local modes of communication.

The alertness of the students to contextual variation is another important finding. They demonstrated a sense of knowing when formality and informality were appropriate; thus, with teachers they used more formal language, while use of more casual registers with friends was matter-of-course. This evidenced an increasing pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic appropriateness, in accordance with Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence. But their practical knowledge was mores intuited than articulated. Even though they could explain how they adjusted their speech for context and listener, few had technical terminology or theoretical explanations for what they were doing. It would appear to confirm what Kasper and Rose (2002) state, namely that pragmatic learning is an implicit process embedded in interaction as opposed to being a conscious subject matter to be taught.

Results also revealed that learners commonly employed repair and clarification strategies for dealing with communication breakdowns. Several participants reported repeating or restating

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

what they had said, or asking for clarification when misunderstandings arose. This result showed that learners themselves were actively involved in sustaining mutual understanding and mirrored aspects of interactional pragmatics as argued by Bardovi-Harlig (2013). Learners' willingness to participate in dysfunctional interaction \may have represented linguistic accountability and communicative robustness as they were trying to create meaning rather than not communicate at all. These findings supported the perspective of Trosborg (1995) and Taguchi (2009) that pragmatic competence includes not only production of contextually appropriate speech acts, but also management of discourse.

However, not all observed trends were positive according to the study. A relatively small number of students indicated teaching with non-verbal symbols such as gestures or facial expressions to support oral language. Moreover, some students seemed reluctant to openly oppose or question concepts in discussions when a teacher was present. Such lack of confidence obviously reflected limited practical fluency and conditions that, typical of learning in a classroom context with few opportunities to engage in spontaneous authentic communication, constrained (i.e. made unnatural) the use of the target language" (p. 14). Ishihara (2010) and Schauer (2009) likewise came to a similar conclusion, that ESL learners in non-native settings may have difficulty with pragmatic fluency unless they receive explicit instruction as well and grow more accustomed to authentic communication.

In general, qualitative and quantitative data were harmonized, giving a coherently grounded insight into how Pakistani students behave in pragmatic terms. The patterns of strategy use were quantified on the basis of the questionnaire outcomes, and its sociocultural reasons were uncovered by the interviews. The meeting point of the two sets of data lent credibility to the notion that students' pragmatic conduct was heavily influenced by cultural norms of respect and hierarchical structures, which are inherent parts of interaction in Pakistani classrooms. It was proposed that Pakistani university students possessed an increasing but culturally underpinning pragmatic knowledge of English. That is, ESL/EFL teachers need to offer pragmatic instruction as a part of language teaching in order to foster learners' awareness of speech acts, politeness and repair strategies, and interactional norms. Classroom exercises like role plays, reflection a homework assignment discussion and comprehension-based debates might help learners access formal English when necessary.

It is concluded, in summary, that Pakistani university students displayed great sensitivity by paying attention to the politeness, indirectness and contextual appropriateness of interaction taking place between teacher and student in an ESL classroom. Practical approaches were made from communicative competence and cultural perspectives. Nevertheless, the provision of explicit instruction in pragmatics and more chances for authentic communication are crucial to enhance the learners' pragmatic knowledge as well as their confidence in using English in real time.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

References

Ahsan, S., Nadeem, M., & Kanwal, S. (2020). A comparative study of refusal strategies used by Pakistani ESL and Malaysian ESL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 16*(3), 1217–1233.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words.* Oxford University Press.

Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing.* Oxford University Press.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2013). Developing L2 pragmatics. *Language Learning, 63*(S1), 68–86.

Barron, A. (2003). *Acquisition in interlanguage pragmatics: Learning how to do things with words in a study abroad context.* John Benjamins.

Barron, A. (2019). Pragmatic competence and pragmatic development in the L2 classroom. *Language Teaching, 52*(2), 237–250. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444818000302

Bashir, A., Qadir, A., & Mahmood, M. A. (2020). Pragmatic failure in Pakistani ESL learners' speech acts: A cross-cultural analysis. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 10*(4), 45–55. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n4p45

Beebe, L. M., & Takahashi, T. (1989). Sociolinguistic variation in face-threatening speech acts. In M. R. Eisenstein (Ed.), *The dynamic interlanguage* (pp. 199–218). Springer.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics, 1*(1), 1–47.

Cohen, A. D. (2018). *Learning pragmatics from native and nonnative language teachers.* Multilingual Matters.

Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Penguin.

Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet.* Pearson Education.

Kasper, G., & Blum-Kulka, S. (Eds.). (1993). *Interlanguage pragmatics.* Oxford University Press.

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language.* Blackwell.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge University Press.

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics.* Longman.

Liao, C., & Bresnahan, M. I. (1996). A contrastive study on refusal strategies in American English and Chinese. *Pragmatics and Language Learning, 7,* 1–18.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Sage.

Mahboob, A. (2009). English as an Islamic language: A case study of Pakistani English. *World Englishes, 28*(2), 175–189.

Mansoor, S. (2005). *Language planning in higher education: A case study of Pakistan.* Oxford University Press.

Rahman, T. (2002). *Language, ideology and power: Language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India.* Oxford University Press.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: **02** Issue No: **04 (2025)**

Rose, K. R. (2005). On the effects of instruction in second language pragmatics. *System, 33*(3), 385–399.
Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language.* Cambridge University Press.
Siddiqui, K. A. (2020). Error analysis of the written English of undergraduate Pakistani ESL learners. *Journal of Language and Education, 6*(2), 134–147.
Taguchi, N. (2015). Instructed pragmatics at a glance: Where instructional studies were, are, and should be going. *Language Teaching, 48*(1), 1–50.
Taguchi, N. (2019). *Pragmatics in language teaching and learning.* Routledge.
Taguchi, N. (2019). *Pragmatics and its interfaces in second language learning.* John Benjamins.
Tajeddin, Z., & Alemi, M. (2021). Developing L2 pragmatic competence through classroom interaction: Teachers' roles and learners' perceptions. *Journal of Pragmatics, 173,* 90–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.12.014
Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics, 4*(2), 91–112. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91
Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.