Empowering EFL Undergraduates: Enhancing Socio-Pragmatic Skills Through Word Wall Activities

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of Word Wall activities on the socio-pragmatic skills of undergraduate EFL students at Northern Border University. As effective communication is increasingly important in professional settings, the research underscores the need for innovative teaching methods that enhance language use and cultural awareness. We analyzed data from 120 female students using a mixed-methods approach, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings show a significant positive association between Word Wall activities and improved socio-pragmatic skills, with mean scores of 4.79 and 4.93 and a standardized regression coefficient of 0.366 (p < 0.001). Participants reported enhanced vocabulary and communication skills across social contexts, appreciating the activities' interactive elements. This research provides valuable insights for ESL teaching and suggests incorporating socio-pragmatic training into curricula to better equip students for real-world communication. Future research may investigate the digital adaptation of Word Wall techniques for wider use in EFL environments.

Keywords: _Effective Communication, EFL Students, Innovative Teaching Methods, Socio-Pragmatic Skills, Word Wall Activities._

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Chomsky (1957), a finite set of components construct language, facilitating communication across cultures (Widdowson, 2003). As education shifts to digital platforms, language instruction now requires innovative methods that go beyond basic grammar. Educators must incorporate practical communication skills essential for the competitive job market.

Integrating socio-pragmatic skills into language teaching is vital for enhancing core competencies. These skills enable students to understand, create, and share messages effectively in diverse contexts, which is particularly crucial in learning English. Employers prioritize effective language use in professional settings; thus, socio-pragmatic skills enhance fluency and understanding of cultural factors like gender and power dynamics. Levinson (1983) emphasizes the necessity of matching language to context, while Leech (1983) underscores the adherence to social norms for effective communication, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula. Miqawati (2020) argues that linguistic proficiency alone is insufficient for successful communication. Teaching socio-pragmatic skills can mitigate confusion and improve cross-cultural communication. As students engage in varied communicative situations, understanding social contexts becomes crucial (Wijayanti & Budi,

2021). Educators must adopt innovative strategies to foster engagement and practical language application. A focus on pragmatics enables learners to express intended messages and recognize implicit assumptions (Cohen, 2010). Historically, communicative competence has included pragmatic understanding; methods for acquiring this knowledge underline the importance of teaching pragmatic structures in both EFL and ESL contexts (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Integrating socio-pragmatic activities into classrooms promotes authentic language use, enhancing engagement and equipping learners with effective communication tools for diverse cultures. Understanding direct versus indirect communication is essential, particularly given the contrasts between low-context cultures like the U.S. and subtle styles common in many Asian cultures. However, modern language teaching often emphasizes memorization over socio-pragmatic skills (Wijayanti, 2017; Widodo, 2015), hindering effective communication (Marti & Fernandez, 2016). To address this, it is necessary to incorporate activities that develop socio-pragmatic skills (Widodo, 2016). This study explores how college students can enhance socio-pragmatic awareness through speaking tasks and evaluates the effectiveness of Word Wall technology in improving socio-pragmatic and critical thinking skills in English classes. The research aims to provide educators with insights for designing activities that foster socio-pragmatic skills while leveraging modern technology for English learning at the university level.

1.1 Contextual Definitions

Socio-pragmatic skills pertain to the effective use of language in social contexts, enabling appropriate interactions based on situational cues. Key components include:

1) Recognizing social environments and relationships requires an understanding of context.

2) Interpreting nonverbal cues to enhance communication.

3) Managing turn-taking during conversations.

4) Practicing politeness and appropriate speech acts.

5) Skillfully transitioning between topics.

6) Enhancing empathy through understanding emotions and perspectives.

7) Modifying language and tone based on relationships.

These skills contribute to positive interactions in personal and professional settings, influencing relationship development and career advancement. Educators can teach these skills through role-playing and social storytelling. Word walls can also enhance socio-pragmatic skills by serving as visual aids that improve vocabulary and social communication abilities essential for teamwork in a college context.

1.2 Main Features of a Word Wall

1) **Selected Word Collection:** Relevant words tied to lessons and themes.

2) **Organized Layout:** Alphabetical or thematic arrangements aid in word discovery.

3) **Visual Aids:** Charts or pictures assist memory retention.

4) **Interactive Elements:** Hands-on activities promote active engagement.

5) **Reference and Resource Use:** Continual assistance with reading and writing

The benefits of word walls in college education include serving as a vocabulary reference, helping students recognize patterns, facilitating academic vocabulary acquisition, and supporting reading and writing endeavors.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kasim (2011) did the first study, "Increase Vocabulary Mastery by Using Word Wall Media," on second-year students at SMP Negeri 26 Makassar during the 2010-2011 school year. This study used Classroom Action Research (CAR) and had two cycles, each with four meetings. Data came from a vocabulary test and observation sheets for 41 students. The results showed clear improvements in vocabulary by the end of the second cycle, indicating that Word Wall media effectively helped improve vocabulary skills, especially since the students started with low proficiency.

Nuzulina (2011) then did the study "The Influence of Using Word Wall Technique Toward Students' Vocabulary Mastery," which used a quasi-experimental design with second-grade students at Islamic Junior High School Al-Furqan Dumai. This research started with a pre-test to see what students knew about English collocations. Results showed a clear difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental group that used the Word Wall technique and the control group.

Rahman (2015) conducted his study, "The Effect of Using Word Wall Technique on Vocabulary Mastery," at Islamic Junior High School Darul Amin Palangka Raya during the 2015-2016 academic year. This quantitative study used a quasi-experimental method with 104 eighth-grade students, comparing class VIII-A, which used the Word Wall technique, to class VIII-C as the control. The results showed a significant increase in vocabulary mastery for students who used the Word Wall technique.

In pragmatics, Rose (2005) states that clear teaching methods work better than indirect ones, while Cohen (2008) shows that teachers' choices between direct and indirect methods affect students' pragmatic learning. Knowing pragmatics is important for effective communication, particularly for EFL learners with limited language exposure. Cohen (2010) highlights the importance of understanding both direct and indirect meanings in communication.

Bardovi-Harlig (1996) supports focusing on pragmatics in teaching because it is complicated, moving away from traditional grammar-centered methods. Yates (2004) insists that learners need to grasp the pragmatic rules of any language. This need calls for thorough evaluations of pragmatic training programs in EFL/ESL settings (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2010; Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009).

Research supports the use of video methods to teach pragmatic concepts, as demonstrated by studies by Rosales and Barragan Quintero (2015) and Garita and Elizondo (2016). Ishihara and Cohen (2014) stress the need for research on how prepared teachers are to teach pragmatics and how to link theory with practice.

Teachers' knowledge of pragmatics greatly affects how well students develop communication skills, so they need to understand pragmalinguistics, which looks at how language forms show intent (Leech, 1983). Holmes (2013) talks about social factors affecting language choices, while Thomas (1983) describes "pragmatic failure" as misunderstanding intended meanings. This situation highlights the need for L2 learners to connect the pragmatics of their first and second languages.

In 2022, Nofita Tamba and others did a study on the Word Wall method and how it helps students with vocabulary. The study showed that students did better on vocabulary tests, with average scores going from 59 in the first test to 67.63 in the middle test, and then to 83.33 in the last test. The study also found that students liked the Word Wall method, saying they enjoyed vocabulary lessons more and felt more engaged. Most students said in surveys that they thought this method helped them with vocabulary, making learning more fun and active. The study suggests that using the Word Wall method could be a beneficial way to help students who struggle with English vocabulary. Khadangi Barani and Mousapour Negari (2023) discovered that video-based pragmatic tests improved participants' awareness, pragmatic skills, and speaking abilities, highlighting technology's role in language education. They support adding these new assessment methods to academic programs.

Lastly, Fitri Wijayanti and Avilanofa Bagus Budi (2021) did qualitative research on how socially contextualized speaking tasks affected first-semester students at a state polytechnic in East Java during 2019-2020. The study involved thirty students aged 18–19 and showed that socio-pragmatic tasks effectively improved students' context awareness, language skills, and participation. The authors concluded that understanding socio-pragmatics is essential for enhancing communication skills in EFL settings, helping students prepare for future jobs.

2.1 Research Gap

This study addresses a gap concerning the enhancement of socio-pragmatic awareness in ESL instruction through Word Wall activities, focusing on the connection between language use and social contexts, particularly for undergraduate students. By capturing students' experiences with digital tools, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of socio-pragmatic skill development in higher education.

2.2 Significance of the Research

The significance lies in enhancing ESL education by emphasizing socio-pragmatic skills and promoting innovative teaching methods like Word Wall activities. The study advocates for curriculum development that integrates socio-pragmatic training and identifies avenues for future research that contribute to effective language skills instruction.

2.3 Implementation Plan: Word Wall

Objective: To enhance vocabulary acquisition and overall language development among students through a comprehensive word wall implementation.

Duration: We integrate the Word Wall activity into the curriculum for a total of 30 weeks, with each semester lasting 15 weeks.

Frequency: We conducted the activity every week, dedicating two hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays for this purpose.

Course Context: Students in seventh and eighth level pragmatics courses have incorporated the Word Wall activity into their curricular activity, with a focus on enhancing their Socio Pragmatic Skills.

2.3.1 Implementation Strategy

Introduction to Word Wall: The teacher introduced the concept of the word wall on the first day of the academic year, explaining its significance and purpose in enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Categorization and Display: We designated a bulletin board in the classroom as the Word Wall, where we categorized words and displayed them alongside their definitions and examples. The categories included:

- Synonyms

- Antonyms

- Homophones

- Idioms

- Phrases

"Word of the Day" Presentations: Each week, a "Word of the Day" presentation introduced a new word.

- Definition

- Example sentences

- Picture or illustration

- Personal connections or anecdotes

Group Projects: We assigned students to work in groups to create interactive activities related to the Word Wall.

- Creating flashcards or posters

- Developing crossword puzzles or word searches

- Writing short skits or plays incorporating the new vocabulary

Students maintained personal vocabulary journals to record new words, their meanings, and examples. They also reflected on their learning and how they applied the new vocabulary in everyday life.

We conducted regular quizzes and assessments to evaluate students' understanding of the new vocabulary. We provided students with feedback on their performance, encouraging them to improve and refine their Socio Pragmatic skills.

2.4 Reflection and Adjustment

Throughout the academic year, the teacher reflected on the effectiveness of the Word Wall implementation and made adjustments as needed. Some areas for improvement included:

- Providing more opportunities for students to engage in interactive activities related to the Word Wall

- Encourage students to develop their own vocabulary games or quizzes

- Incorporating technology-based tools to enhance vocabulary learning, such as online flashcard apps or vocabulary-building software

The Word Wall implementation was a successful endeavor that contributed significantly to students' vocabulary acquisition and overall language development. By providing a comprehensive and engaging approach to learning, the activity promoted meaningful language interaction and fostered a dynamic learning environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-method research design by employing quantitative and qualitative data analysis using the descriptive study. This study was conducted on female undergraduate students at the Department of Language and Translation of Northern Border University in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the study focused only on female students from levels 7 and 8, with a total population of 167. According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the minimum sample required for 167 population is 118. Still, the study used 120 female students as samples above the requirement to measure the implementation of word wall activities in ESL instruction. Also, the sample was selected based on the stratified random sampling method because the total population is known and fixed (Cochran, 1997).

Further, the measurement scale includes four sections. First, levels and age group. Second, three close-ended questions were used to measure the general perceptions of word wall activities, and four close-ended questions were used to measure socio-pragmatic language skills development using a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). Third, three open-ended questions were used to understand the specific instance, content, and suggestions about the word wall activities in improving socio-pragmatic language skills. Fourth, 1 close-ended question was used to get the overall rating of the effectiveness of word wall activities for enhancing language development using a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932).

In addition, data were collected from the students through Google Forms in the class through a cross-sectional data collection method (Turner, 2013). Three-stage data analysis were used in the study. Stage one is for the quantitative analysis using simple linear regression (Dodge, 2008) to find the straight-forward relationship between two variables with descriptive statistics, reliability statistics, model summary, ANOVA, regression coefficient, and regression formula. Stage two is for the qualitative analysis based on the open-ended answers from the respondents using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Stage three was to evaluate the overall rating of the effectiveness of word wall activities using cross-tabulation (White, 2004).

The demographic profile of the study included a total of 120 female students. Further, all the students are from levels 7 and 8 with ESL in the age group of 16 to 20. Moreover, there are 73 (60.8%) students were selected from level 7 and 47 (39.2%) from level 8.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Stage One

In stage one, the quantitative analysis will include descriptive statistics, reliability statistics, model summary, ANOVA, regression coefficient, and regression formula.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Description	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Word Wall Activities	4.79	0.36	120
Socio-Pragmatic Language Skills	4.93	0.14	120

Source: Developed by author(s) based on data

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics of word wall activities in ESL instruction and socio-pragmatic language skills for 120 participants. The mean score and standard deviation Fisher & Marshall (2009) of word wall activities were 4.79 (0.36), and socio-pragmatic language skills were 4.93 (0.14), indicating a higher rating and low variability.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
0.839	0.841	7

Source: Developed by author(s) based on data

Table 2 indicates the reliability statistics for the scales with three items of word wall activities in ESL instruction and four items of socio-pragmatic language skills. The Cronbach's alpha Cronbach (1951) value of 0.839 suggests that the measurement items are reliable for measuring the underlying construct.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.502	0.252	0.246	0.382

a. Predictors: (Constant), Word Wall Activities

b. Dependent Variable: Socio-Pragmatic Language Skills

Source: Developed by author(s) based on data

Table 3 shows the relationship between predictor (word wall activities) and dependent variable (socio-pragmatic language skills). Also, an R-value of 0.502 demonstrates a moderative positive correlation Cohen (1988), and the R^2 value of 0.252 explains approximately 25.2% of the variance in socio-pragmatic language skills with consistent explanatory power (Hair et al., 2018).

Further, the standard error of the estimated value of 0.382 reflects the average deviation of observed scores from the predicted values, suggesting acceptable accuracy for the model (Field, 2024).

Table 4: ANOVA

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.725	1	6.242	42.589	0.000
	Residual	55.690	118	0.147		
	Total	74.414	119			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Word Wall Activities

b. Dependent Variable: Socio-Pragmatic Language Skills

Source: Developed by author(s) based on data

Table 4 highlights the regression model results of ANOVA analysis, indicating a significant impact of predictor (word wall activities) and dependent variables (socio-pragmatic language skills) (Frost, 2020).

Further, the sum of squares for a regression value of 18.725 with an F-value of 42.589 and a significant value of p=0.000 confirms the model's statistical significance (Kutner et al., 2005).

Also, the residuals with a smaller portion of the variance of a sum of squares with 55.690 highlight the effectiveness of word wall activities in influencing socio-pragmatic language skills (Field, 2024).

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.281	0.168		13.594	0.000
	WOWL	0.319	0.061	0.366	5.269	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Word Wall Activities (WOWL)

b. Dependent Variable: Socio-Pragmatic Language Skills

Source: Developed by author(s) based on data

Table 5 represents the regression coefficients model predicting socio-pragmatic language skills based on word wall activities. The constant (β=2.281, p<0.001) indicates the baseline level of socio-pragmatic language skills when word wall activities are absent. Also, the standardized coefficient (β=0.366, p<0.001) shows that word wall has a significant positive effect on socio-pragmatic language skills, with a t-value of 5.269 supporting the strength of this relationship. Therefore, increased word wall activities are associated with improved socio-pragmatic language skills.

4.1.1 Regression Formula

$$\gamma = 2.281 + 0.319 \, (Word \, Wall \, Activities)$$

γ represents socio-pragmatic language skills (dependent variable), 2.281 is the constant (baseline value when word wall activities = 0), and 0.319 is the unstandardized coefficient for word wall activities, indicating that γ increases by 0.319 units for each unit increase of word wall activities. Therefore, word wall activities are the independent variable and positively influence socio-pragmatic language skills from a baseline value of 2.281.

4.2 Stage Two

In stage two, qualitative analysis was used to measure the responses to the open-ended questions from the students, which were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

4.2.1 Specific instance where the word wall helps in a social or group activity

Based on the responses from both level 7 and 8 students, it is evident that the word wall activities impact performance and skill development. Also, the data of level 7 students reveals that the activity fostered improvements in classroom participation, teamwork, self-confidence, speaking ability, basic reading, and vocabulary acquisition. Further, the students appreciated the word wall activities, reinforcing them in basic communication, vocabulary retention, social communication cues, tests and quizzes.

At the same time, the data of level 8 students mentioned that word wall activities enhance social communication skills, essay writing, contextual vocabulary usage, academic communication skills, self-study habits, deeper engagement and broader skill applications. Moreover, level 8 students acquire advanced abilities such as international examinations like IELTS and TOEFL, presentations, group discussions, effective interaction in unstructured and structured settings, humour, active listening, and emotional competence.

Therefore, word wall activities were valuable for socio-pragmatic language skills for both level 7 and 8 students. Hence, the key areas of improvement suggested by the level 7 students include focusing on higher-order skills such as fluency and persuasive techniques and level 8 students emphasizing real-world applications like leadership communication and negotiation.

Also, the student's responses highlighted the need for interactive learning for level 7 and strategic understanding of language usage to increase engagement and self-confidence for level 8. So, word wall activities address each level's unique needs, ensuring socio-pragmatic language skills for social skill development and sustained academics.

4.2.2 Using word wall in language development

The analysis revealed that the value of word wall activities in language development levels 7 and 8 students in terms of effective language development indicates positive feedback. Also, students repeatedly described word wall activities as engaging, dynamic and supportive in enhancing vocabulary and communication skills. Further, students used phrases such as effective for learning, interactive tool, excellent support, highlighting the easy-to-use resource. Thus, the response trend includes the students' appreciation of the conducive learning environment and interactive nature. Moreover, word wall activities were promising for student engagement and language development, supporting socio-pragmatic language skills.

4.2.3 Suggestion for the word wall or its use in class

Most students' responses suggest a positive reception to the word wall activities, expressing satisfaction specifically; level 8 students commented excellent, great, and good. Also, students appreciated and suggested implementing the word wall activities in other courses for effectiveness. However, a few level 7 students insisted on extended activity time and needed more practice. Also, the most common suggestions of level 7 include paragraph exercises, incorporating sentences, additional contextual examples, and increasing the number of hours dedicated to the course. Moreover, levels 7 and 8 students repeatedly mentioned insufficient time and the need for more opportunities. Therefore, based on the suggestions from the students of levels 7 and 8, there is a need to consider extended course duration, structured practice opportunities, and integrating the activities into other courses. So, word wall activities would support students in leading, learning, and improving the overall outcomes.

4.3 Stage Three

In stage three, the cross-tabulation method was used to measure the overall rating of the effectiveness of the word wall activities.

Table 6: Overall Rating

Levels	Rating		Total
	Excellent	Good	
7	66	7	73
8	43	4	47
Total	109	11	120

Source: Developed by author(s) based on data

Table 6 indicates the overall rating of the effectiveness of word wall activities to enhance the student's language development. There are two levels, 7 and 8, with 120 respondents; in level 7, out of 73 students, 66 rated excellent, and 7 rated good, while in level 8, out of 47 students, 43 rated excellent, and 4 rated good. Out of 120 students of both levels 7 and 8, students rated excellent was 109 and good was 11. Therefore, this indicates that word wall activities are incredibly positive and highly effective in improving socio-pragmatic language skills.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of word walls on the development of socio-pragmatic skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduates at Northern Border University. We collected data from a sample of 120 female students using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The statistical analysis demonstrated a positive correlation between engagement in Word Wall activities and the enhancement of socio-pragmatic language skills. Participants reported mean scores of 4.79 for Word Wall activities and 4.93 for socio-pragmatic skills, indicating a generally favorable perception of these educational tools.

Regression analysis revealed a standardized coefficient of 0.366 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that increased participation in Word Wall activities is associated with improvements in socio-pragmatic skills. Furthermore, the ANOVA results corroborated this model, yielding a p-value of 0.000 and affirming the significant role that Word Wall activities play in enhancing students' socio-pragmatic competencies.

The thematic analysis of student feedback unveiled several areas of improvement. Level 7 students reported advancements in foundational skills such as vocabulary acquisition and classroom participation, while Level 8 students noted enhancements in writing proficiency, contextual vocabulary usage, and communicative abilities applicable to various academic tasks. Many respondents articulated that Word Wall activities fostered an engaging and dynamic learning environment, which in turn bolstered their communication skills and overall confidence.

Students characterized the Word Wall as an "interactive tool" providing "excellent support" for their language development, facilitating a better understanding of social cues, and promoting active participation in group activities.

The feedback clearly illustrated that these activities contributed significantly to the cultivation of socio-pragmatic awareness, equipping students with essential skills for real-life interactions.

Despite the observed benefits, students expressed a desire for additional practice time with Word Wall activities and proposed enhancements to the program. Specifically, they requested more contextual examples, integrated writing assignments, and extended durations for activities.

6. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role that word walls play in the advancement of socio-pragmatic skills among EFL learners. The positive correlation between the utilization of word walls and the enhancement of student communication skills highlights the potential of this pedagogical approach in the context of language acquisition.

Participants noted notable improvements in essential socio-pragmatic skills, including effective language use in context, intuitive understanding of social communication, and increased confidence in verbal expression.

These skills are vital in today's interconnected world, and the focus on socio-pragmatic awareness underscores the imperative for higher education institutions, as well as schools and educators, to implement innovative strategies such as this.

Moreover, the qualitative data illuminated the level of student engagement with Word Walls, illustrating that this interactive approach fosters deeper learning experiences. The study advocates for curriculum reform to incorporate effective instructional tools like Word Walls and encourages exploration of digital adaptations to further enhance learning experiences.

Future research should consider longitudinal studies to evaluate the sustained benefits of Word Wall activities and investigate how digital formats can optimize EFL instruction for better socio-pragmatic skill development. This research contributes valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge on language learning, offering practical recommendations for improving EFL teaching and ensuring that students are better equipped to navigate diverse communication scenarios.

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