

Unlocking Pragmatic Competence: Teaching Speech Acts and Implicature Through Literature in EFL Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Pragmatic competence is essential for EFL learners, yet literature classes often prioritize vocabulary, comprehension, and thematic interpretation over explicit instruction in speech acts and conversational implicature. This study addresses the need for a structured pedagogical model that integrates pragmatic theory into literary text analysis. Using a design-based research approach, this study developed and piloted the PILAR Framework—Pragmatic Investigation for Literary and Applied Reading—through Bessie Head’s short story “Looking for a Rain God.” The study combined pragmatic content analysis with a small-scale classroom pilot involving 20 sixth-semester English Education students. Speech acts were classified using Searle’s taxonomy, while conversational implicatures were analyzed through Grice’s cooperative maxims. Identified features were mapped onto five instructional stages: Awareness-Raising, Linguistic Analysis, Contextual Interpretation, Practical Application, and Reflective Transfer. The textual analysis identified 42 teaching-relevant pragmatic features, including directives, expressives, commissives, declarations, and conversational implicatures. Pilot findings indicated improvement in students’ pragmatic comprehension after the six-session implementation, particularly in recognizing speech acts, identifying illocutionary force, and inferring implied meanings. However, all learner groups showed difficulty interpreting culturally embedded implicatures. The findings suggest that the PILAR Framework offers a systematic and pedagogically usable approach for teaching pragmatics through literary texts in EFL contexts. Although the pilot provides promising preliminary evidence, further validation with larger samples, comparison groups, delayed post-tests, and refined assessment procedures is needed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research shows that literary texts are valuable for language learning, building linguistic and cultural competence, and exposing learners to real-life pragmatic behavior in context (Lazar, 2009). However, research in EFL literature classrooms consistently demonstrates that pragmatic competence is frequently underemphasized in pedagogical practice. Instructors typically place greater emphasis on vocabulary acquisition and comprehension tasks, rarely offering explicit instruction on the analysis of speech acts or implicature, despite their relevance to textual interpretation. As a result, EFL learners, even at advanced proficiency levels, may misinterpret illocutionary intent and overlook implicature in the absence of targeted instructional support (Bardovi-harlig, 2013; Taguchi, 2015). A recent meta-analysis encompassing 29 studies on L2 pragmatics instruction indicates that explicit teaching methods significantly enhance the development of pragmatic competence (Wei et al., 2023). Notably, the effect sizes are especially significant in foreign language environments ($g = 2.13$), such as the EFL contexts considered in the present study.

Among available literary genres, short stories have garnered significant attention as effective tools for pragmatic instruction. Their concise structure enables a focused analysis of speech act sequences and violations of Gricean maxims within a manageable textual scope (Culpeper, 2002). Nevertheless, current research employing short stories for pragmatic instruction has predominantly been analytical rather than pedagogical; these studies identify pragmatic elements in texts but do not effectively convert these observations into structured, reproducible classroom practices. A meta-analysis of studies on L2 pragmatics instruction demonstrates that using authentic texts in a pedagogically sequenced manner yields significantly superior pragmatic learning outcomes compared to form-focused instruction alone (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019). This finding highlights the importance of developing a structured framework to fully realise the instructional potential inherent in short stories.

Without such a framework, learners and teachers lack clear guidelines for choosing and teaching pragmatic features from literary texts (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006). Although both pragmatic instruction and literary texts are recognised as valuable components of EFL pedagogy, they have largely evolved independently, with minimal systematic integration between these two areas. Prior research on instructed pragmatics has primarily concentrated on explicit form-focused instruction, role plays, and discourse completion tasks (Bardovi-harlig, 2013; Taguchi, 2015). However, these approaches have not yielded a replicable pedagogical model that utilizes literary narrative as the central instructional vehicle. Conversely, literature-based EFL pedagogy has concentrated on reader response, cultural analysis, and vocabulary enrichment (Lazar, 2009), largely leaving speech act analysis and conversational implicature outside the pedagogical scope. This situation has led to a clearly defined instructional gap: EFL educators aiming to enhance learners' pragmatic competence through literary texts lack an established, theory-based framework. Specifically, there are no sequenced instructional stages, systematically identified pragmatic features, or integrated assessment criteria available for guidance (Roever, 2021). This gap is especially pronounced in advanced EFL contexts, such as university-level programs in Indonesia and comparable environments, where students engage with complex authentic texts yet do not possess an adequate analytical framework to interpret and utilize their pragmatic content.

Although three established frameworks have addressed the issue of pragmatic instruction, none fully meet the needs for an integrated, literature-based model essential for advanced EFL environments. Kasper and Rose (2002) developed a foundational acquisition framework for second language pragmatics, establishing that pragmatic competence can be taught. However, their model is primarily acquisitional in nature; it outlines developmental sequences without offering explicit, classroom-ready instructional stages or guidance on integrating literary texts. Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan's (2006) 6Rs Framework (Raise awareness, Respond, Research, Reflect, Rehearse, Re-evaluate) was the first structured approach for teaching pragmatics in EFL classrooms, but it targets general communication, depends on scripted dialogues and role play, and lacks a way to analyze pragmatic features in authentic literary texts. Taguchi's (2015) review of 58 instructional intervention studies found explicit pragmatic instruction

effective but noted that none used literary texts as primary input, leaving the link between literature and pragmatics unexplored. These frameworks show pragmatic instruction is effective but lack a model for applying it to literary text analysis. Previous research has mainly covered pragmatic instruction in general (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi, 2015). This study seeks to bridge the identified gap by introducing and piloting the PILAR Framework (Pragmatic Investigation for Literary and Applied Reading), a structured, sequential instructional model specifically developed to incorporate speech act theory and conversational implicature into literary text analysis within EFL classroom. This study is directed by four research questions: (RQ1) Which speech acts and conversational implicatures are identifiable and classifiable in Bessie Head's "Looking for a Rain God," and how are these 42 features distributed among illocutionary categories and Gricean maxim types? (RQ2) In what ways can the pragmatic features found in the text be systematically aligned with the five stages of the PILAR Framework to generate an organized, reproducible protocol for EFL pragmatic instruction? (RQ3) What trends in pragmatic comprehension, such as speech act identification, recognition of illocutionary force, and inference of implicature can be observed among various learner groups during the pilot application of the PILAR Framework? (RQ4) What preliminary findings does the pilot yield concerning the framework's capacity to enhance pragmatic competence, and which components should be improved in future iterations?

2. METHODS

This study utilises a design-based research approach (McKenney, S & Reeves, 2019), which encompasses the development of a framework alongside iterative testing and refinement. This research combines theoretical analysis of pragmatic competence with practical application. It utilises historical, conceptual, contextual, and comparative literary analyses to demonstrate how pragmatic training through literary texts contributes to the development of ELT students' pragmatic competence (Munir & Yavuz, 2024). Additionally, it examines the role of the PILAR Framework in enhancing EFL learners' pragmatic awareness via engagement with literary texts.

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a Design-Based Research (DBR) framework and mixed methods, combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative pilot assessment, to examine the principles and teaching structures of the PILAR Framework and provide initial evidence of its classroom use. Consistent with McKenney and Reeves (2019) three-phase DBR model was adapted into four related stages in this study. Phase 1 (Analysis) analysed Bessie Head's "Looking for a Rain God" using Speech Act Theory and Gricean maxim analysis, identifying 42 pragmatic instructional features. Phase 2 (Design) organized these features into the five-stage PILAR Framework, each stage with targeted activities and tasks. Phase 3 (Pilot Implementation) piloted the framework over six sessions with 20 sixth semester students from English Education study program at Universitas Muslim Indonesia, using a one-group pre- post-tests design to collect data on students' pragmatic comprehension. Phase 4 (Evaluation and Refinement) used pilot data to refine the framework ahead of further validation. This study represents the first phase of a multi-cycle DBR process, with preliminary findings and planned framework updates for future cycles.

2.2 Research Approach

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, focusing mainly on qualitative content analysis to examine literary texts in EFL instruction, alongside quantitative pre-and post-assessments during the pilot phase. Content analysis identifies language patterns, themes, and functions within the data, making it a flexible tool for evaluating communication across written, visual, and audio formats (Hinchliffe & Harwood, 2019). In literary pragmatics, this approach is useful for clarifying how speech acts, implicatures, and context shape meaning in narrative fiction. Moreover, current research demonstrates that the incorporation of explicit pragmatic analysis into literary studies substantially improves learners' communicative competence (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006; Taguchi, 2015). This

approach identifies both implicit and explicit pragmatic meanings in literary texts, providing insight into how literary language develops EFL learners' pragmatic competence.

2.3 Scope and Object of Study

This study investigates the exploratory development and preliminary evaluation of the PILAR Framework, utilising Bessie Head's short story "Looking for a Rain God" as the primary instructional text. This study focuses on three objectives: (a) identifying and categorising pragmatic features in the text via Speech Act Theory and Gricean analysis; (b) creating a five-stage instructional framework based on these features; and (c) piloting its classroom use with advanced EFL learners over six sessions. Framework validation is not included here and will be addressed in a future DBR cycle with wider sampling and expert review.

2.4 Operational Definitions

2.4.1 Pragmatic Competence

This refers to the ability to employ and interpret language suitably within social contexts, including both the execution of speech acts and the understanding of conversational implicature. In the context of this study, pragmatic competence denotes the capacity to discern meaning that extends beyond literal interpretation when engaging with literary texts.

2.4.2 Speech acts

The utterances that enact communicative functions, as categorized by Searle's (1976) taxonomy into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. This study examines the ways in which literary texts employ various speech acts to illuminate character motivations and dynamics of power.

2.4.3 Conversational Implicature

Meaning that is conveyed beyond the literal interpretation of an utterance, typically resulting from deviations from Grice's cooperative maxims (Grice, 1975; Sentf, 2014). This study investigates the role of literary characters' implicatures as focal points for pragmatic instruction.

2.5 Research Setting

The pilot implementation was conducted at the Faculty of Letters, Communication Sciences & Education (FSKIP), Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), within the English Education Study Program. The participants were representative of English Education Study Program's 20 sixth-semester students. During the study, participants were enrolled in a literary analysis course, which served as the institutional context for the PILAR pilot. The proficiency level was established through an institutional academic assessment. All participants demonstrated foundational competence in the theoretical principles underpinning the PILAR Framework by successfully completing prerequisite coursework in both Literature in Language Teaching and Pragmatics. Demographic data on age range and gender distribution were not systematically collected during this exploratory iteration.

2.6 Data Sources and Sampling

2.6.1 Primary Data

The sources include the literary text "Looking for a Rain God" by Bessie Head (Head, Bessie., Brown, M., 2013), classroom observation records, pre- and post-implementation test results, as well as student work samples such as analysis worksheets and reflection journals collected during the pilot implementation.

2.6.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data include Peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and theoretical analyses in the fields of pragmatics, second language acquisition, and literary pedagogy that offer contextual insight and theoretical grounding.

2.6.3 Tertiary Data

Curriculum documents, assessment rubrics, and pedagogical frameworks derived from previous research provide additional insights into the linguistic and instructional aspects of pragmatic teaching.

A total of 20 participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals enrolled in the sixth semester of the English Education Study Program at FSKIP UMI who possess a sufficient background in literature in language teaching and have completed coursework in pragmatics relevant to the PILAR pilot. Those who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study. First, this approach aligns with the scope of Iteration 1 DBR pilots, where the principal objective is to collect data adequate for informed framework refinement rather than achieving statistical generalisation (McKenney Reeves, 2019). Second, it is consistent with the participant range reported in similar DBR studies within EFL pedagogy: Munir and Yavuz (2024) conducted their literary pragmatics intervention with one cohort of English Language Teaching students, and Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006) initially implemented their 6Rs Framework in a single intact classroom group as a pilot study prior to undertaking wider validation efforts. Third, a sample of 20 participants provided adequate analytical depth to achieve the qualitative aims of this study. Within this cohort, four distinct comprehension profiles (Groups I–IV) were identified, facilitating meaningful comparisons of reading behaviours including recognition of illocutionary force, identification of speech acts, and inference of implicature. Before data collection began, institutional approval was obtained from FSKIP UMI, confirming that the pilot study fell within the faculty's approved scope of classroom-based pedagogical research. At the first session, the researcher explained the study to all 20 students and collected verbal informed consent. Participation was voluntary and had no academic consequences. All data were anonymised using group codes, ensuring confidentiality throughout the process.

2.7 Data Collection Techniques

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the framework's effectiveness, this study employs a multi-faceted data collection approach ensuring thorough exploration of both textual and instructional aspects of pragmatics teaching.

2.7.1 Literature Review

This review surveyed works on pragmatics, speech act theory, EFL teaching, and literary pedagogy, providing the theoretical basis for the PILAR Framework and linking it to research on pragmatic competence and literature-based instruction.

2.7.2 Document Analysis

A systematic study of "Looking for a Rain God" identified essential pragmatic patterns, speech act distributions, and conversational implicatures, forming the basis for 42 teaching points in the framework.

2.7.3 Pilot Assessment

It employed parallel-form pre-post tests administered immediately before and after the six-session PILAR implementation. Each test included 10 items: five multiple-choice questions on speech act and illocutionary force, and five short-answer questions addressing conversational implicatures from dialogues and text. Multiple-choice items were worth fewer points due to lower cognitive demand, while short-answer responses earned more based on accuracy and depth, resulting in a total score over 10. The parallel forms were developed from the same content area but used different stimulus texts to reduce familiarity. Content validity was ensured by aligning each item with at least one of 42 pragmatic features and the five PILAR stages. No formal reliability analysis was done, which is a noted limitation. Classroom monitoring, questionnaires, and focus group data provided a qualitative context for interpreting test scores among the four learner groups.

2.8 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis conducted in this study is structured into two complementary strands corresponding to the objectives of the PILAR pilot: (1) a qualitative approach that emphasises the

identification, classification, and contextualisation of pragmatic features found within the literary text, and (2) a quantitative approach that assesses learners' pragmatic comprehension both prior to and following the implementation of the framework. The four analytic techniques utilized pragmatic content analysis, thematic mapping, hermeneutic contextualisation, and comparative pre–post analysis operate as integrated processes within the two principal strands, each fulfilling a distinct and well-defined role. Collectively, these methods construct a unified multi-method framework rather than embodying four discrete methodological approaches.

In the qualitative strand, pragmatic content analysis is used to systematically identify and categorize speech acts and conversational implicatures based on Searle's (1976) illocutionary acts and Grice's (1975) cooperative maxims, resulting in 42 instructional points forming the framework's foundation. This coding used a deductive approach, focusing on categorical accuracy over interpretive agreement. The primary researcher coded all data independently, then a co-researcher reviewed the 42 classifications using the same theoretical frameworks. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion, referencing the primary definitions. A formal inter-rater reliability coefficient, such as Cohen's kappa, was not computed since the deductive application of a fixed taxonomy does not require the open-ended agreement evaluation for which kappa is designed (Gamarra & Heron, 2025; Rau & Shih, 2021). Instead, categorical consistency was maintained through theoretical grounding and confirmatory peer review. Hermeneutic contextualisation enhances pragmatic content analysis by placing features in their sociocultural context. It is a reading practice, not a separate method, and helps interpret pragmatic meanings that require cultural understanding, such as those linked to Tswana belief systems.

These interpretive claims were based on Phase 1 textual evidence and verified with secondary literature, creating a clear link from text to interpretation. Thematic mapping shows how 42 features are distributed across the five PILAR stages, revealing pragmatic patterns in each stage. Codes based on stage definitions ensure consistent and replicable interpretation. The quantitative strand used comparative pre–post analysis to measure learner pragmatic comprehension gains, relying only on descriptive statistics and effect size (Cohen's *d*), without inferential testing. This decision is based on three pilot design constraints: (1) a small sample size ($n = 20$) unsuitable for parametric tests like the paired-samples *t*-test; (2) normality of score distributions was not checked, so parametric assumptions cannot be met; and (3) the main goal is framework refinement, making effect size more relevant than *p*-values at this stage (McKenney, S & Reeves, 2019). Learner comprehension across four groups was assessed using classroom observation notes and comprehension profiles, alongside quantitative pre–post test scores analyzed with descriptive statistics and effect sizes. In Iteration 2, paired-samples *t*-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests will be used after checking for normality. This mixed-methods approach combines qualitative insights and quantitative pilot data to support the theoretical development and instructional potential of the PILAR Framework.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study utilized a qualitative methodology within a design-based research framework to develop the PILAR Framework (Pragmatic Investigation for Literary and Applied Reading) as an instructional model aimed at fostering pragmatic competence through short story analysis in EFL contexts. Data were collected through two primary methods: firstly, a close reading of Bessie Head's "Looking for a Rain God" to identify pragmatic features; and secondly, the observation and assessment of 20 sixth-semester students from English Education study program of FSIKP UMI, who participated as field study subjects.

The theoretical foundation for the pragmatic analysis is based on two principal theories: (1) Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976), which categorizes illocutionary acts into five types—representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations; and (2) conversational implicature theory (Grice, 1975), which elucidates how speakers convey meanings beyond literal

interpretations through the Cooperative Principle and its four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner.

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Pragmatic Features in "Looking for a Rain God"

By employing theory-driven close reading, 42 pragmatic features were systematically identified and categorized into speech acts and conversational implicatures. The following table details the allocation of these pragmatic features.

Table 1. Distribution of Pragmatic Features in "Looking for a Rain God"

Pragmatic Category	Primary Function in the Narrative	Frequency
Directives	Power relations, authority, desperation	12
Expressives	Emotional crisis, grief, desperation	8
Commissives	Ritual obligations, moral breakdown	5
Declarations	Legal verdict, social transformation	3
Conversational Implicatures	Cultural norms, unspeakable acts, moral ambiguity	14
Total		42

The evaluation of all 42 pragmatic features was performed based on three pedagogical suitability criteria: (1) clarity, relating to the ease with which students can identify each feature; (2) significance, denoting the feature's contribution to narrative meaning; and (3) accessibility, measuring its appropriateness for advanced EFL learners. All 42 features were determined to meet these criteria.

3.1.2 Speech Act Analysis in the Short Story

a. Directives

Directives make up the largest group in this analysis, appearing 12 times. According to Searle (1976), directives are speech acts where a speaker encourages or pushes someone else to take action. In the short story, these directives highlight the characters' social ranking and the power relationships between them.

A key example is when Mokgobja suggests performing a ritual by saying, "*We must move to the lands.*" This statement is considered an obligatory-commissive directive because it uses the modal verb "must," which conveys both authority and urgency. Unlike softer suggestions like "*Could we consider moving?*" or "*I think we should move,*" Mokgobja's choice of words leaves no opening for debate—it presents a command as if it were a shared decision.

Indirect directives are also present, wherein the expectation to act is suggested rather than explicitly communicated. For example, during periods of severe drought, Mokgobja does not issue a direct command to his family to perform a sacrifice; instead, he narrates a story about a "*rain god who only accepts the sacrifice of children's bodies.*" This method embeds the directive within cultural tradition, leading family members to perceive their actions as adherence to custom, rather than compliance with a direct instruction.

b. Expressives

The narrative features eight expressive speech acts, predominantly occurring during periods of emotional crisis. According to Searle (1976), expressive acts reflect the speaker's psychological state; in this context, they serve as indicators of critical turning points within the story.

The most salient expressive utterance arises from the mother's confession to the authorities: "*At this time, the mother of the children broke down and told everything*". The narrative utilises reported speech

instead of direct quotation, intentionally omitting explicit content as a strategic means to produce implicature. The depiction of "breaking down" signifies an expressive act communicating psychological distress and culpability beyond what direct language can convey.

Additional expressive speech acts manifest in the portrayal of the women's lamentation: *"Each night they started a weird, high-pitched wailing that began on a low, mournful note and whipped up to a frenzy"*. Although not conveyed as direct speech, this passage demonstrates a collective expression of grief and significant guilt, which pragmatically functions as an indirect acknowledgment of responsibility.

c. Commissives

Five commissive speech acts are identified, primarily linked to ritual obligations and the moral relationships among characters. Commissive speech acts, as defined by Searle (1976), commit the speaker to a future course of action. Within this narrative, these commissives possess significant cultural complexity; although the obligations they establish are deemed unlawful under contemporary legal standards, they retain legitimacy within the traditional belief system.

Mokgobja's reference to the rain god constitutes an implicit commissive, wherein he asserts that performing the ritual will result in rainfall. This form of commissive is inherently unverifiable, as it represents a promise rooted in belief rather than empirical evidence. The subsequent failure to fulfil this promise (i.e., the absence of rain following the ritual) serves as the impetus for the ensuing moral crisis that shapes the resolution of the story.

d. Declarations

Three declarative speech acts emerge in the narrative, each pertaining to the legal system. Declarations are speech acts that alter reality by virtue of their utterance, wherein the statement itself constitutes the action (Austin, 1962). The most consequential declaration is found in the resolution: "the old man and Ramadi were sentenced to death for ritual murder."

From a pragmatic perspective, this sentence exhibits absolute declarative authority; the pronouncement of the death sentence goes beyond mere description and actively changes the legal and social standing of Mokgobja and Ramadi. It is noteworthy that this legal declaration stands in contrast to an earlier cultural declaration, which held that ritual sacrifice was considered both acceptable and essential within traditional belief systems. The resulting tension between these two systems of declarations forms the ideological foundation of the story's central conflict.

3.1.3 Conversational Implicature Analysis

The story identifies fourteen conversational implicatures. According to Grice (1975), implicatures occur when speakers intentionally disregard one or more conversational maxims to convey meanings beyond the literal interpretation. Within this narrative, implicatures serve as tools for conveying information that is unsuitable for direct communication due to its potentially burdensome, risky, or embarrassing nature.

a. Flouting the Maxim of Quantity

The Maxim of Quantity requires speakers to provide information appropriate to the communicative context, ensuring that their contributions are neither excessive nor insufficient for the situation at hand. In Head's narrative, there is a consistent provision of less information than necessary for complete understanding, which constitutes a deliberate flouting of this maxim and leads to significant implicatures. Implicature refers to the meaning that is suggested or implied rather than explicitly stated; in this context, the narrative's omissions encourage readers to infer the underlying emotional weight and horror of the events.

A prominent instance of this occurs in the omission of direct quotations from the discussion between Mokgobja and his family regarding the ritual. For example, when Head writes, *"He spoke to his family, but the words are not recorded,"* this deliberate silence compels readers to imagine the unspoken tension and trauma within the family. As a result, readers are not informed of the precise content of these interactions, how consent was obtained, or how the children responded to the situation. This

strategy, functioning as implicature, underscores the act's "unspeakability" by implying that its horror cannot be adequately expressed in conventional language.

b. Flouting the Maxim of Relation

The Maxim of Relation stipulates that each conversational contribution should be pertinent to the ongoing discussion. Head's narration often includes environmental details that may initially seem tangential to the central narrative but, in fact, convey significant implicatures.

For instance, the sentence "*It was really the two women who caused the death of the little girls*" serves as a nuanced example of flouting the maxim of relation. Placed within the context of the family's disintegration, the attribution of causality to "*the two women*" is both unexpected and striking, thereby suggesting a moral complexity that extends beyond the legal question of culpability. The term "really" further accentuates this implicature, intimating an underlying reality that contrasts with the official legal interpretation.

c. Flouting the Maxim of Manner

The Maxim of Manner emphasizes clarity, conciseness, and the avoidance of ambiguity. Head consistently utilizes figurative language that contravenes this maxim to produce complex layers of meaning. For example, the expression "*the story of the children hung like a dark cloud of sorrow over the village*" departs from literal clarity, yet it suggests a shared sense of loss experienced by the entire community, not solely Mokgobja's family. Likewise, the characterization "*the sun danced dizzily in the sky, with a strange cruelty*" attributes human qualities to the sun, implying that nature itself is enacting retribution upon the community for their actions.

3.1.4 Students' Pragmatic Comprehension Data

An observation of 20 sixth-semester students from English Education study program of FSIKP was conducted to profile each learner's pragmatic comprehension across three dimensions: (1) speech act identification, the ability to recognise the type of speech act (directive, expressive, commissive, or declarative) realised by an utterance; (2) illocutionary force recognition, the capacity to identify the communicative intent underlying an utterance beyond its literal meaning; and (3) conversational implicature inference, the skill to derive meaning that is implied rather than stated, arising from the flouting of Gricean maxims. It is essential to clarify that Table 2 presents comprehension profile data rather than pre- and post-test scores. Each column indicates the raw number of pragmatics features each participant identified through classroom observation and reading response tasks, based on the 42 features established during Phase 1 (pragmatic content analysis), which includes 28 speech acts and illocutionary force instances as well as 14 conversational implicatures. No maximum limit was established for individual dimensions, as the number of features identified by each participant was determined by the extent of their reading rather than a predetermined item set. The "Score" column reflects the aggregate count of features identified across all three dimensions. These profile data differ from the weighted pre-post test scores ($M = 15.65$ to 24.40), which assessed comprehension improvement using a structured instrument with differentiated item weighting. Table 2 below presents the results for all four groups.

Table 2. Students' Pragmatic Comprehension Data

No.	Participant (P)	Speech Acts	Illocutionary Acts	Implicature
		Score (features identified)		
Group I				
1	P1	7	15	4
2	P2	7	15	4
3	P3	7	15	4

No.	Participant (P)	Speech Acts	Illocutionary Acts	Implicature
		Score (features identified)		
4	P4	7	15	4
Group II				
5	P5	8	13	3
6	P6	8	13	3
7	P7	8	13	3
8	P8	8	13	3
9	P9	8	13	3
Group III				
10	P10	9	12	5
11	P11	9	12	5
12	P12	9	12	5
13	P13	9	12	5
14	P14	9	12	5
Group IV				
15	P15	7	10	7
16	P16	7	10	7
17	P17	7	10	7
18	P18	7	10	7
19	P19	7	10	7
20	P20	7	10	7

Overall, Group III demonstrated the most balanced pragmatic comprehension, showing competence in identifying speech acts, discerning illocutionary force, and inferring implicatures. Nonetheless, all groups experienced difficulties when interpreting culturally embedded implicatures, which remain the most challenging aspect of pragmatic comprehension due to their reliance on an in-depth understanding of sociocultural context. These findings highlight the significance of explicit and systematic instruction, such as that offered by the PILAR Framework.

3.2 Discussion

The following discussion systematically incorporates findings from pragmatic text analysis alongside students' comprehension data, illustrating their interrelationship within the PILAR Framework as an instructional model. Pragmatic features identified through text analysis are directly mapped to student comprehension outcomes to demonstrate how each stage of the PILAR Framework fosters deeper understanding. The PILAR Framework—comprising awareness-raising, linguistic analysis, contextual interpretation, practical application, and reflective transfer—offers a structured methodology for teaching pragmatics through literary works. This approach is consistent with Derakhshan & Eslami's research (2020) regarding pragmatics and literature instruction. Providing

learners with contextually relevant input via video, employing pragmatic instruction techniques such as metapragmatic consciousness-raising, translation, and discussion, has proven effective in enhancing their ability to comprehend implicatures and suggests directions for further scholarly inquiry. The discussion is structured according to the five stages of the PILAR Framework, underscoring the importance of each phase in supporting student learning and advancing pragmatic competence. PILAR Framework Stages and Student Comprehension:

3.2.1 Awareness-Raising Stage: Building Pragmatic Awareness through the Short Story

The initial phase of the PILAR Framework aims to facilitate students' awareness of pragmatic elements within literary texts, highlighting their significance in effective communication. Typically, students engage with short stories merely at a descriptive level, focusing on "what happens" without thoroughly examining the underlying reasons and mechanisms of language use.

This trend is evident in group data. In group I, students who identified the highest number of illocutionary force features (15) but inferred the fewest implicatures (4), were most focused on causal relationships and links within the text. However, they still struggled to interpret implied meanings. This demonstrates that without intentional awareness-raising, students' pragmatic competence stops at recognition rather than interpretation.

At the Awareness-Raising stage, activities should be designed to make pragmatic contrast salient and cognitively available to learners. One effective technique is modal substitution: presenting the same directive utterance with varying modal auxiliaries (e.g., 'must', 'should', 'could') and asking learners to identify how each choice constructs a different degree of authority and interpersonal positioning. This technique draws learners' attention to form-function relationships without requiring prior familiarity with the story's cultural context, making it accessible as an entry point before sociocultural scaffolding is introduced in Stage 3.

It is found that no group successfully identified pragmatic features associated with the external dimensions of the story. The PILAR perspective underscores the value of awareness-raising initiatives that move beyond textual analysis, highlighting the necessity of integrating sociocultural context and author background. These factors are critical for interpreting implicatures linked to African cultural norms. In alignment with the PILAR Framework, a thorough understanding of cultural context is fundamental for accurate interpretation of cross-cultural implicatures (Derakhshan, 2021; Taguchi, 2019).

3.2.2 Linguistic Analysis Stage: Identifying and Categorizing Pragmatic Features

The second stage of the PILAR Framework emphasizes the systematic identification and classification of pragmatic features, employing the speech act taxonomy from Searle (1976) and Grice's (1975) maxims as core analytical instruments. At this stage, students are expected to advance from simply recognising spoken words by characters to analysing linguistic actions in detail, including identifying the illocutionary force present in each utterance and discerning implicatures resulting from violations of conversational maxims.

The pragmatic analysis of the text identified 42 features, with directives (12 occurrences) and conversational implicatures (14 occurrences) representing the two predominant categories. In the Linguistic Analysis phase, this distribution has direct pedagogical implications: the high frequency of directives highlights illocutionary force recognition as the essential analytical skill to prioritize, while the substantial presence of implicatures necessitates that learners progress beyond basic speech act identification to develop inferential pragmatic reasoning, a higher-level competence distinguishing advanced from intermediate EFL pragmatic readers.

Analysis of student data at this stage reveals significant variation in pragmatic competence. Group I demonstrated the highest proficiency in identifying illocutionary force (15 features), reflecting a strong understanding of both the functional aspects of language and the actions conveyed through utterances. In comparison, Group II identified the largest number of speech acts (8 features) but relatively few

implicatures (3 features), indicating a focus on explicit linguistic elements with less attention to implied meanings. Group III showed consistent performance across all three areas, suggesting a comprehensive approach to pragmatic interpretation. Group IV detected the most implicatures (7 features) relative to their identification of illocutionary force (10 features), revealing a tendency to prioritize implicit meanings even if not always correlating these interpretations with explicit linguistic analysis.

These findings yield important instructional implications. The PILAR Framework recommends the implementation of pragmatic analysis worksheets that direct students to classify the illocutionary type of each principal utterance, identify linguistic markers such as modal verbs, hedges, and sentence mood that indicate illocutionary force, and articulate the communicative function within the narrative context. As demonstrated by the previously discussed directive examples, this analytical approach encourages learners to evaluate how particular modal choices convey varying degrees of authority and interpersonal stance. This exercise facilitates the systematic mapping of linguistic form to communicative function, offering broad applicability to directive statements across literary texts. Implementing such an explicit analytical strategy provides a solid foundation for advanced pragmatic interpretation in later stages. These instructional outcomes are consistent with Wei et al's (2023) assertion that optimal effectiveness in pragmatics instruction is achieved when learners receive explicit guidance in connecting specific linguistic forms, such as modal auxiliaries and performative verbs with their associated illocutionary functions in authentic discourse contexts, rather than relying solely on decontextualized pattern recognition.

3.2.3 Contextual Interpretation Stage: Pragmatics, Power, and Culture

The third stage of the PILAR Framework establishes connections between pragmatic features and narrative context, character development, power relations, and cultural norms. This stage is both essential and demanding, as the interpretation of pragmatic meaning is inherently dependent on sociocultural context (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

"Looking for a Rain God" is particularly effective for the Contextual Interpretation stage, as it distinctly highlights the intersection of two pragmatic frameworks Western legal-communicative norms and traditional African conventions regarding implicature and speech acts within a concise, accessible text. This explicit structural contrast provides EFL learners with a tangible foundation to cultivate comparative pragmatic awareness, a skill Taguchi (2015) considers essential for advanced L2 pragmatic competence: the ability to discern that pragmatic meaning varies across cultures and is shaped by cultural context.

An illustrative example is the narrator's assignment of causality to "the two women," a claim whose pragmatic significance is contingent upon the reader's understanding of the colonial legal system and prevailing gender dynamics—contexts that remain implicit within the text. In terms of the Contextual Interpretation stage, this instance highlights an important pedagogical principle: when extrinsic implicatures are involved, learners benefit from explicit pre-reading support regarding the author's background, historical era, and sociocultural environment. Such scaffolding is necessary prior to the reading task, as it cannot be effectively developed spontaneously during interpretation.

Student responses underscore the complexity of this stage; all groups failed to identify key extrinsic features, impeding their ability to engage in comprehensive contextual analysis. Without awareness of Head's background, the colonial history, and traditional belief systems, many implicatures in the story remain inaccessible. This finding aligns with Kim et al's (2023) research, which demonstrates that even relatively proficient EFL learners face considerable difficulties with implicatures rooted in cultural context, as opposed to those indicated by structural cues. This underscores the necessity of providing explicit sociocultural instruction during the Contextual Interpretation phase, rather than if learners will independently deduce such meanings. Collectively, both studies support the broader assertion that intentional, theoretically informed instructional design whether through digital task simulation or literary text analysis is crucial for fostering pragmatic competence among EFL learners. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that these instructional gains are

most substantial when teaching extends beyond surface-level comprehension and emphasizes functional and contextual language application.

In the context of the PILAR Framework, this stage can be advanced by employing interpretive questions such as: Why does the narrator present the mother's confession indirectly rather than providing a direct quotation? What implications might this narrative technique have regarding her emotional state and the narrator's perspective? These inquiries guide students beyond superficial analysis toward more nuanced pragmatic interpretation.

3.2.4 Practical Application Stage: Transferring Pragmatic Understanding

The fourth stage of the PILAR Framework facilitates opportunities for students to demonstrate their pragmatic understanding across multiple contexts. In this context, competence is cultivated through the practical application of knowledge, aligning with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in Shabani (2016), which posits that learning is fundamentally influenced by social interaction. The sociocultural domain focuses on mediation and examines the various mediational tools embraced and valued within society.

An effective approach at this stage is pragmatic substitution, whereby learners modify a key utterance by replacing the original speech act with an alternative such as transforming a directive into a suggestion or a rhetorical question and subsequently evaluate how this change influences the power dynamic, perceived intent of the character, and implied meaning. The instructional significance of this exercise is derived not from strict adherence to the source text, but from its capacity to highlight and allow manipulation of the functional outcomes resulting from pragmatic decisions—a fundamental skill that Stage 5 seeks to further develop.

Assessment of student data provides valuable indicators of group preparedness for this phase. For example, Group IV exhibited a reversed implicature-to-illocutionary force ratio (implicature = 7, illocutionary force = 10) compared to Group I (illocutionary force = 15, implicature = 4), often progressing directly to symbolic interpretation without sufficient causal analysis. The PILAR framework underscores the importance of implementing more rigorously structured application activities for Group IV. Students are expected to support their interpretations with comprehensive linguistic analysis before proceeding to make wider pragmatic claims.

Furthermore, integrating cross-cultural comparison activities is particularly beneficial at this juncture. Students may analyse the communication of parallel scenarios, including familial decision-making in times of crisis and the interplay between traditional authority and contemporary legal systems within the Indonesian context. These comparative analyses not only expand pragmatic understanding of the narrative but also cultivate the intercultural pragmatic competence central to the goals of the PILAR Framework. This differentiated approach aligns with Taguchi and Wei et al (2015; 2023) recommendation that instructed pragmatics activities should engage learners in considering the functional implications of pragmatic choices, rather than focusing solely on structural substitution. By doing so, application tasks foster genuine form–function awareness instead of merely promoting superficial manipulation of linguistic patterns.

3.2.5 Reflective Transfer Stage: Metacognition and Pragmatic Autonomy

The fifth and final stage of the PILAR Framework highlights the importance of metacognitive awareness in the learning process and facilitates the application of acquired skills across diverse contexts. Achieving deep learning necessitates reflective engagement with the process, thereby fostering knowledge retention, transfer, and learner autonomy.

Within this study, reflective transfer is operationalized through prompts such as: "In what ways has analyzing speech acts and implicatures altered your reading of this story? Please provide specific examples where your initial interpretation shifted following pragmatic analysis." Such questions prompt students to contrast their pre- and post-analysis understandings, recognize pragmatic blind

spots, and develop strategies for engaging with literary texts through a more pragmatically informed perspective.

Analysis of group data indicates that varied comprehension patterns across cohorts (e.g., Group I exhibiting strength in illocutionary force, Groups III and IV demonstrating proficiency in implicature inference, and Group II excelling in speech act identification) illustrate distinct "pragmatic reading styles." In the context of PILAR, this diversity is regarded not as a limitation but as an asset for group reflection. Learners with different orientations can contribute to the collective interpretation: those focused on illocutionary force may support causal analysis, while those attuned to implicature can enhance understanding of implied meanings.

Aligned with findings from the pilot implementation, wherein participants reported increased awareness of pragmatic features in both communication and literary analysis, the reflective transfer stage in this research encourages students to employ similar analytical approaches in real-world English interactions. This includes attentiveness to speech act selection, recognition of Gricean maxim violations, and awareness of generated or interpreted implicatures during authentic communication. Taguchi's (2015) review of instructed pragmatics research also notes that reflective and metacognitive tasks are the least represented aspect in the literature, notwithstanding their theoretical significance for lasting pragmatic competence. Consequently, this pilot study offers an operationalized model for this understudied stage, which may be adapted and evaluated in subsequent research.

3.2.5 Pedagogical Implications of the PILAR Framework in EFL Pragmatics Instruction

Drawing on pragmatic text analysis and student comprehension data, this study reveals several substantive pedagogical implications for the application of the PILAR Framework in EFL classrooms. The integration of pragmatic and literary analyses offers complementary instructional advantages that neither method provides on its own. By engaging learners with the pragmatic elements identified in Phase 1 through explicit linguistic examination, rather than incidental reading, the short story's rich pragmatic content serves as an effective training corpus. A succinct narrative featuring a substantial concentration of directive speech acts and conversational implicatures within a cohesive cultural framework allows for consistent exposure to diverse pragmatic forms as an outcome less attainable with fabricated dialogues or isolated examples. This positions genuine literary texts as highly effective resources for teaching pragmatics.

Differences observed in students' comprehension patterns underscore the importance of differentiated instruction during PILAR implementation. For instance, Group I demonstrates proficiency in recognising illocutionary force and can be further challenged with more nuanced implicatures. In contrast, Group IV, which often interprets symbolically, benefits from additional scaffolding during the Linguistic Analysis phase to establish analytical foundations prior to engaging in pragmatic interpretation. This strategy aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, as each group exhibits a unique ZPD and thus requires individually tailored support (McLeod, 2024).

The collective difficulty of all groups in recognising extrinsic pragmatic features indicates that Stage 1 (Awareness-Raising) within the PILAR Framework should deliberately incorporate contextual information regarding the author, historical period, and publication context as core instructional elements, rather than presuming students already possess this background knowledge. The PILAR Framework maintains that comprehending sociocultural context is essential for accurately interpreting cross-cultural implicatures.

This pilot study has several limitations. Using only one literary text ("Looking for a Rain God") means the pragmatic findings cannot be generalized to other genres, lengths, or cultures. Without a control group, pre-post gains may reflect factors unrelated to the PILAR Framework, like test familiarity or maturation. The post-test was given directly after instruction, so retention and real-world transfer remain untested. Only sixth-semester students participated, limiting applicability to other EFL settings and levels. Group differences in proficiency create confounds, preventing attribution of

comprehension patterns solely to engagement with pragmatic features. These limitations are recognized as clarifying the specific scope of the pilot's claims and establishing the empirical objectives for Iteration 2 of the PILAR research programme, rather than detracting from its contributions.

Despite these constraints, a clear distinction must be made between two levels of the study's findings, each with distinct claims regarding generalizability. The first level includes specific pragmatic features observed in "Looking for a Rain God," the comprehension profiles of the learner groups involved, and the effect size recorded from this single-site pilot. These results are context-specific and are not intended to be generalized beyond the parameters of this iteration. The second level pertains to the five-stage sequence of the PILAR Framework and the pedagogical principles embedded within each stage, representing transferable design knowledge consistent with the standards defined by the DBR methodology (McKenney, S & Reeves, 2019). These principles emerge from the integration of theory and practice, and are designed to be tested, refined, and adapted across various texts, learner groups, and instructional settings. Specifically, the following design principles are proposed as broadly transferable beyond this pilot project: (a) sequencing pragmatic awareness prior to formal feature analysis (Stages 1–2) establishes a pedagogically sound progression from noticing to categorisation that is independent of the specific text; (b) incorporating sociocultural scaffolding during the Contextual Interpretation stage (Stage 3) applies to any literary text where pragmatic meaning is shaped by culture rather than being structurally explicit; (c) implementing pragmatic substitution tasks at Stage 4 represents a technique applicable to any text featuring directive or nuance-rich utterances; and (d) utilising metacognitive reflection prompts at Stage 5 provides an adaptable, text-independent approach suitable for any unit focused on literary pragmatics. The principal contribution of Iteration 1 to the broader instructed pragmatics literature lies in these framework-level principles, rather than in the pilot's specific quantitative results.

Finally, this study affirms that literature-based, comprehension-focused instruction can significantly promote pragmatic awareness. The pilot implementation of PILAR produced substantial improvements in pragmatic awareness test scores across all 20 participants, with pre-test scores yielding $M = 15.65$ ($SD = 2.08$) and post-test scores yielding $M = 24.40$ ($SD = 3.98$), representing a mean gain of 8.75 points ($SD = 2.00$). The corresponding effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.75$, calculated using pooled standard deviations) is classified as exceptionally large by conventional benchmarks (Brydges, 2019), indicating that the PILAR pilot produced a practically significant shift in pragmatic comprehension performance. As previously noted, no inferential significance test was conducted in this iteration given the constraints of sample size and distributional assumptions; the effect size is therefore reported as an indicator of practical magnitude rather than statistical significance and should be interpreted with appropriate caution pending replication in a larger, controlled design. Observed variations across the four learner groups consistently suggest that students with heightened sensitivity to implied meanings are particularly well-positioned to benefit from explicit pragmatic instruction.

Table 3. Pre-Post Pragmatic Comprehension Scores by Learner Group (N = 20)

Group	N	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Gain	Cohen's d	Pragmatic Strength
I	4	13.25 (1.71)	20.00 (3.92)	6.75	2.23	Illocutionary force
II	5	16.40 (1.14)	26.80 (2.28)	10.40	5.77	Speech act identification
III	5	15.20 (2.59)	23.40 (4.83)	8.20	2.12	Balanced (all three)
IV	6	17.00 (0.89)	26.17 (1.47)	9.17	7.53	Implicature inference
Total	20	15.65 (2.08)	24.40 (3.98)	8.75	2.75	—

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation in parentheses. Cohen's d calculated using pooled standard deviations per group. The Pragmatic Strength column reflects the primary comprehension dimension identified through classroom observation. Effect sizes for individual groups should be interpreted with caution given small per-group n .

4. CONCLUSION

This study offers four key contributions to the field of instructed EFL pragmatics. Theoretically, it expands upon Searle's (1976) speech act taxonomy and Grice's (1975) cooperative maxims by applying them to literary pragmatics instruction, illustrating that Bessie Head's short story "Looking for a Rain God" serves as a valuable yet underexplored resource for L2 pragmatic analysis. Methodologically, the research introduces the PILAR Framework—a five-stage instructional model comprising Awareness-Raising, Linguistic Analysis, Contextual Interpretation, Practical Application, and Reflective Transfer—which integrates the literature-pragmatics interface within a DBR design cycle and provides a replicable procedural template previously lacking in the field (Taguchi, 2015; Wei et al., 2023). Pedagogically, the pilot implementation revealed differentiated learner profiles, demonstrating that the PILAR Framework effectively accommodates individual differences and can be employed diagnostically to customize instructional support. Empirically, the pilot indicated a substantial pre- to post-intervention improvement in pragmatic comprehension across all participant groups, offering preliminary evidence in support of conducting a full-scale Iteration 2. These findings should be considered, considering four main limitations: use of a single text and site ($n = 20$), absence of a control group, no delayed post-test, and possible proficiency confound from ability-based groups. Iteration 2 will address these by expanding the sample, adding a comparison group, pre-registering scoring, and including a delayed post-test for retention and transfer evaluation.

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