

**The Effect of Using Activities based on  
Second life Online Program on Developing  
Secondary Students' Pragmatic  
Competence  
of the English Language**

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## Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of using activities based on Second Life online program on developing the secondary stage students' English language pragmatic competence. Based on reviewing literature and related studies, the researcher viewed the Second Life online program and the pragmatic competence and its branches in the different kinds of speech acts. The participants of the present study were 24 of the first secondary stage students at Mohamed Metwaley El-Sharawy Applied School in New Cairo. The instruments for collecting data were: a checklist, a pre-posttest, and a scoring scale rubric. The program included 5 units and every unit has 5 lessons. The proposed program used in the present study has achieved observable development in the participants' pragmatic competence. This was reflected in the high scores of the participants of the experimental group. This indicated that the proposed program was successful on developing the pragmatic competence of the 1st secondary stage students. According to the obtained results, the study presented several recommendations and suggestions that can help on developing other educational aspects.

**Key words:** Second Life Online Program – Pragmatic Competence – Speech Act – Formal and Informal Speech Act - Colloquial Language – Idiomatic Expressions – Role plays - Field trips.

## مستخلص الدراسة

تهدف هذه الدراسة الي قياس تأثير استخدام الأنشطة القائمة عل برنامج الحياة الثانية الإلكتروني لتنمية الكفاءة التداولية للغة الانجليزية لدي طلاب المرحلة الثانوية. وقد تمت مراجعة الادبيات والدراسات السابقة المتعلقة ببرامج الواقع الافتراضي والتي من بينها برنامج الحياة الثانية ومراجعة الادبيات والدراسات السابقة المتعلقة بالكفاءة التواصلية. وقد تناولت الدراسة المنهج الشبة التجريبي من حيث نظام المجموعة التجريبية الواحدة. وقد تكونت مجموعة الدراسة الحالية من 24 طالب وطالبة من الفرقة الاولى من المرحلة الثانوية بمدرسة محمد متولي الشعراوي التكنولوجية المتقدمة بالتجمع الخامس بالقاهرة للعام الدراسي 2023\2024. ولقد استخدمت الدراسة الادوات التالية: قائمة بالمهارات الخاصة بالكفاءة التداولية واختبار قبلي وبعدي لقياس الكفاءة التداولية.

البرنامج مكون من خمس وحدات تم تصميمه وتدريبه من خلال استخدام أنشطة قائمة على الكفاءة التداولية لتنمية الخطاب الحواري لدي هؤلاء الطلاب. وقد تم تطبيق الاختبار قبليا على مجموعة البحث ثم تم تدريس البرنامج , وبعد ذلك تم تطبيق الاختبار البعدي لقياس فاعلية برنامج الحياة الثانية الإلكتروني لتنمية الكفاءة التداولية. تم تحليل النتائج احصائيا وكذلك حساب حجم الاثر. وقد اظهرت كلا من النتائج الكمية والكيفية عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة احصائية بين متوسطات درجات طلاب مجموعة البحث عند مستوي (0.01) في التطبيق القبلي والبعدي لاختبار مهارة الكفاءة التداولية ككل وفي كل مهارة فرعية على حدة لصالح درجات التطبيق البعدي.

وعلى ضوء تلك النتائج, قدمت مجموعة من التوصيات والمقترحات ذات صلة بمجال تعلم اللغة الانجليزية وبذلك خلص البحث الي وجود تأثير لاستخدام الأنشطة القائمة عل برنامج الحياة الثانية الإلكتروني لتنمية الكفاءة التداولية للغة الانجليزية لدي طلاب المرحلة الثانوية.

## Introduction

Technology plays a vital role in today's human society development. The rapid development in technology has positive effects on a new kind of social educational process, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. When dealing with the English language as the main gate to all different practical fields of life, educators endeavor to take advantage of modern educational technology to enrich the tasks of language learning contexts either written or orally via immersing students in appropriate authentic communicative situations. Having the will to be challenging, creative, collaborative, and competitive is the hallmark of spicing up our teaching and learning to be more engaging, authentic, and immersive.

Teaching in the world of 3D multi-user virtual environments (MUVES) and digital game-based learning (DGBL) become the alternative innovative language instruction. This becomes in some aspects much more beneficial for students than the traditional way of learning in the classroom. Language educators face many challenges in changing the current teaching/learning landscape to help the new generation of students develop their different communicative discourses in general and their pragmatic competencies of everyday life, in particular, to keep pace with the digital information age.

Pragmatics, in its informal “Cocktail Party” definition, is the study of “how-to-say-what-to-whom-when” (Kozar, 2023). Formally, it is “the study of language usage” (Suárez, 2022). In particular, pragmatics studies “the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate” (Lee, 2015). So, the main aim of pragmatics is the “use” of language and how to deal with it appropriately.

Hazaymeh (2012) states that raising EFL learners’ pragmatic awareness may be achieved through different possible means including new learning technologies, the Internet, and the World Wide Web (WWW) which affects the twenty-first centenary and made significant changes in education. Ostrand et. al (2016) describes Virtual worlds as “environments created by technology that incorporate virtual representations of various elements found in the real world.”. Porwol & Ojo (2020) also defines it as “a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers”.

As one of the developments of virtual worlds, multiuser virtual environments (MUVES) have been quickly gaining importance as tools of FL instruction that promote collaboration and social presence in a lifelike 3-D environment (Benini & Thomas, 2020). Educational institutions are increasingly interested in MUVES and their instructional possibilities (Kuznetcova & Glassman, 2020). It has emerged as a powerful

learning platform providing a three-dimensional, interactive learning experience for students (Çoban & Göksu, 2022).

Second Life (SL) remains one of the most recognized and favored multi-user virtual environments (MUVE), with a user population exceeding eight million since its inception in 2003 (Hismanoglu, 2024). Unlike game-oriented multi-user environments such as World of Warcraft (WoW), where the primary objective is to win or compete against others, Second Life focuses on social interaction, creativity, and community building (Second Life Official Website, 2024).

Second Life is an online virtual world that allows users to interact and communicate through their avatars. These avatars, which visually represent the users, are described as “the bodily manifestation of one’s self in the context of a 3D virtual world” (Second Life Community, 2020; Second Life Year in Review, 2020).

Second Life (SL), created by San Francisco-based Linden Lab and launched in 2003, offers free programs and viewers that allow residents to explore the virtual world, meet other users, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, and create services and properties with others. In other words, SL provides an online virtual community where residents can own land, build houses, and either rent or reside in them (Linden Lab, 2021). Large corporations such as IBM, Sony, Nissan, and Mercedes-Benz have

invested significant resources to create Second Life islands, and many celebrities have live performances through their avatars (Davis, 2022).

### **Learning languages in Second Life**

Since the main aim of teaching English is to understand and use the English language effectively to communicate in authentic social and school environments, many studies highlight the importance of using English in different social media platforms in and beyond EFL classrooms. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) state that language learning in EFL settings in secondary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic took place in a fully online environment because students and teachers are not able to gather in face-to-face contexts, such as online quizzes, assignments, as well as projects given to students, written reflections, reports, etc. They highlight that there is a need for secondary school teachers to refine their use of techniques, applications, and platforms for online/ virtual EFL learning and to enrich their knowledge of how to employ virtual games, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality.

Second Life provides a platform where language learners can meet and hold conversations in a multimedia-rich environment, giving participants a sense of “being there” (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Two characteristics of a conversation in SL, which together create a unique experience, are the use of avatars and the immersive nature of the environment in which they



interact. While the avatar is still operated and controlled by the learner, the focus shifts from the real person to the avatar, allowing the language learner to speak without “losing face” (Brown, 2022). They recognize the significant features and possibilities that it holds for language learning, especially because it enables free virtual wandering (e.g. by walking, running, underwater diving, flying, and teleporting) and interacting through representative avatars with others around employing both text-based chat and voice chat (Abdallah & Mansour, 2015).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The present study is delimited to:

- 1) A sample of 24 students in the first secondary stage.
- 2) The blended learning approach is used when dealing with the activities of the study, as the study combines face-to-face teaching and the Second Life online program.
- 3) Pragmatic competence activities depend on some kinds of speech act that are suitable to the secondary stage students according to their age and their level of the English language.
- 4) Second Life activities that are suitable for the proposed study (Second Life Idiomatic Role Play – Second Life Field Trip).

## **Instruments of the Research**

The present research aims at investigating the effectiveness of using activities based on Second life Online Program on developing secondary students' pragmatic competence. Therefore, the researcher used the following tools:

- A pre/posttest.
- Checklist.
- Rubric.
- SL Field Trip Reflection Sheet.
- Satisfaction Questionnaire.
- The study of five units was designed. Every unit tackled many topics. The units contain the types of speech act functions, formal and informal language, idiomatic expressions, and colloquial language. the units also contain activities that are related to the general topics of the unit. These activities were diverse and varied between paper activities and Second Life online program activities.
- Funny Idioms Pictionary.

## **Hypothesis of the study**

The statistical analysis which was presented in this study proved that using activities based on Second life Online Program developed secondary students' pragmatic competence. This was proved by analyzing the results of the pre and post pragmatic competence test as a whole and in each sub-competence of the test through using t-test and calculating the effect size.

The results of the study regarding pragmatic competence as a whole showed that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the study group participants on the pragmatic competence pre and posttest administrations in the overall pragmatic competence in favor of the posttest mean scores. It was found that the T test of the pragmatic competence test as a whole has reached (0.88) at the level of (0.01) with a large effect size.

In order to verify this hypothesis, a T-test was conducted. The following table shows the results:

**Table (1)**

*T-test results of the pre-posttest of the experimental group participants in the pragmatic competence as a whole*

Skill	Measurement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T Value at 0.05	Df	Sig.	Effect Size ( $\eta^2$ )
<i>the overall of the Pragmatic Competence</i>	<b>Pre</b>	24	25.54	3.02	39.77	23	0.00	0.88 <b>Large</b>
	<b>Post</b>	24	78.54	5.43				

T test table in ( 23 degree of freedom ) at 0.05= 2.07

T test table in ( 23 degree of freedom ) at 0.01= 2.81

The significance difference of the main skills of pragmatic competence shows variation in their development. They are:

**Table (2)**

*The Pragmatic Competence Main Skills Development*

<b>Sub-skill</b>	<b>Effect size</b>
<i>Lexical Knowledge</i>	(0.90) large
<i>Functional Knowledge</i>	(0.86) large

The significance difference of the sub-skills of pragmatic competence shows variation in their development. They are:

**Table (3)**

*The Pragmatic Competence Sub-Skills Development*

<b>Main Skills</b>	<b>Sub-skills</b>	<b>Effect size</b>
<b>Lexical Knowledge</b>	<i>Able to use an adequate range of oral or written words and expressions correctly</i>	(0.90)
	<i>Able to use correct and appropriate idiomatic expressions in oral / written informal situations</i>	(0.93)
	<i>Able to use correct and appropriate colloquial contractions in oral / written informal situations</i>	(0.87)

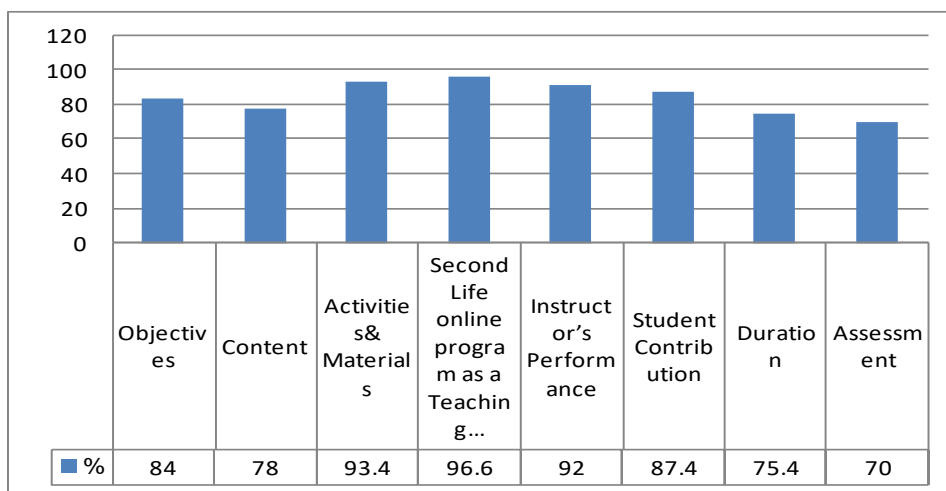
<b>Functional Knowledge</b>	<i>Able to produce and respond to different functions of speech act of the English language appropriately and effectively in different social situations</i>	(0.89)
	<i>Able to choose appropriate formal or informal speech act according to the level of interaction between the speakers and according to the cultural and social contexts</i>	(0.83)

**The Students’ Satisfaction e-questionnaire of the study**

The researcher presented a student’s satisfaction questionnaire that consisted of ( 8 ) themes and the results of the following figure shows all the percentages of students’ responses to the satisfaction questionnaire:

**Figure (1)**

*Students’ Overall Percentages of the Satisfaction Questionnaire*



First of all, most of the students were not aware of the importance of speech act functions, strategies, and formality. Accordingly, they were very enthusiastic to take part in the study, especially through its activities in Second Life. Once the students understood the objectives of the study, some of them started to gain more knowledge and play an active and effective role in the study. This was clear from their satisfaction percentage of the objectives of the study (**84%**) which was a high percentage.

Regarding the content of the study, the units were selected based on speech act functions of everyday language and it offered adequate knowledge of these functions. The students were very much interested in the difference between the formal and the informal language, idioms, and colloquial contractions. So, the students understood the main aim of the study and its content in raising their pragmatic competence in the English Language and showed a high percentage of satisfaction with the study's content reached (**78%**).

According to the activities and materials of the study, the students were very enthusiastic with the various and enjoyable videos. Also, there were many conversational activities and exercises that helped them greatly in effectively developing their language functions. So, the overall students' satisfaction percentage with the activities and learning materials of the study was high and reached (**93.4%**).

In regard to the Second Life online program as a teaching method, the students' satisfaction percentage was the highest percentage of all the percentages of the satisfaction questionnaire parts (**96.6%**). This percentage was consistent with their enthusiasm during the learning process. They were dealing with Second Life as a learning activity in a leisure environment and this helps greatly to facilitate to gain the main aims and objectives of the study.

Concerning the instructor's performance, most of the students were satisfied and pleased with the performance of the instructor. Most of the students felt that they were respected and encouraged when they participated in discussions and activities of the study and they did not feel bored. The percentage of students' satisfaction with the instructor's performance was (**92%**), which was the second highest percentage of all the percentages of the student satisfaction questionnaire parts.

Students' contribution during the study was very active with a friendly and enjoyable learning atmosphere. This helps greatly in raising the percentage of the student satisfaction questionnaire to be (**87.4%**).

Regarding the duration of the study, the students were satisfied with the allocated time of the whole study and of each activity in order to achieve the decided objectives of the study. The study was finished before the students' final exams of the year and

this helped them in not feeling that the study was long. So, their satisfaction percentage for the duration of the study was **(75.4%)**.

The assessment methods of the study were various and there was more than one technique to judge and assess the students' performance either formative assessment or summative assessment. There were also some ongoing assessment techniques, such as quizzes, assignments, and instructor observations. The students' satisfaction questionnaire percentage of assessment was **(70%)** which considered to be the lowest percentage of all the satisfaction questionnaire percentages. This result could have appeared because most students were more interested in the activities and tasks of the study rather than tests.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions can be appeared as the following:

- 1- There is a positive effectiveness in using virtual learning environment as Second Life program in developing learning and teaching English language in general and pragmatic competence in particular.
- 2- Using the proposed study enable the students to participate actively in the learning process and increase the interaction between the students using the target language.
- 3- This proposed study indicated that it is important to improve the pragmatic competence of the students and that could be



obvious during the administration when learning the different kinds of speech act, the formal and the informal language, and the idiomatic expressions of the English language.

- 4- Teachers have various roles when using the virtual environment, as they can be mentors, participants, moderators, and facilitators of learning.
- 5- Teachers should vary in using authentic interactive activities according to students' needs and interests that develop their pragmatic competence.
- 6- EFL students usually face problems when communicating in English correctly because they lack practicing authentic English practicing outside school. Second Life program could solve this problem by enabling students to acquire new experiences and giving students a chance to practice speech act by using different activities in real-world tasks and a motivated and enthusiastic environment.
- 7- Second Life activities encourage students to have cooperative interaction among them in the field trip activity which strengthens their personality and provides them with confidence.
- 8- The main object of teaching English as a foreign language is to communicate with other speakers correctly. Therefore, the

proposed study helps the learners to have an appropriate practice for using utterances appropriately and accurately.

- 9- The results of this study show that role-play activities develop students' pragmatic competence by conveying different kinds of speech acts and idiomatic expressions through them and this helps in having more conductive in developing pragmatic ability.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the current study, the following points can be recommended:

- It is important to utilize nontraditional methods and techniques in TEFL/TESL to create a student-centered learning environment.
- EFL teachers should use a virtual learning environment such as Second Life to increase students' participation and motivation.
- EFL teachers should teach the different strategies of speech act functions in order to develop the students' pragmatic competence.
- EFL teachers should vary their methods, procedures and ways of teaching according to their students' needs and interests.

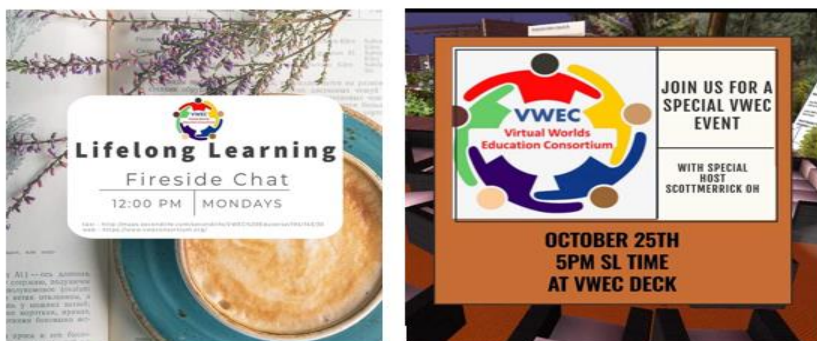
- EFL teachers should motivate their students to participate in the learning process by providing more freedom of action and helping them to speak and express themselves more freely.
- EFL teachers should be trained to use this virtual learning environment in their classrooms.
- Second life provides various places and opportunities for practicing authentic activities through an educational environment free of fear and threats which is recommended for language acquisition to motivate EFL learners.
- EFL teachers should be trained to adopt alternative types of assessment like e-portfolio and reflection sheet.

### **Suggestions**

According to the results of this research, more studies could be suggested in teaching English. Here are some of the topics that deserve investigation:

- More studies should be held on the importance of using Second Life program in TEFL/TESL, as the studies relevant to the Egyptian or Arab context are very rare.
  - Further research can be needed in the importance of SL Virtual conferences and educational groups in developing teaching English. Ex, VW Education Consortium (VWEC) is considered one of SL educational groups that handles
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weekly or monthly meetings and yearly conferences (VWBPE). They wrote their goal on their Facebook page is to bring educators together both to share what has been successful and to tackle obstacles across virtual platforms and communities (<https://www.facebook.com/VWECconsortium?mibextid=ZbWKwL>)



- More studies could be conducted on the importance of using SL virtual language courses for developing English language learning.
- Further research is needed in to explore the effectiveness of using libraries in SL.
- More studies should be conducted on using Economy and Business in SL.
- More studies could be held on using other SL virtual activities for developing English Language Learning.

- Conducting studies that use Second Life program with Autism spectrum.

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