



THE ROLE OF DIDACTIC GAMES IN DEVELOPING SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17985834>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 17th December 2025

Accepted: 18th December 2025

Online: 19th December 2025

KEYWORDS

didactic games, sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, primary education, communicative competence, language use, game-based learning

ABSTRACT

The development of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence is a crucial aspect of communicative language learning in primary education. These competences enable learners to use language appropriately according to social context, communicative purpose, and cultural norms. Didactic games are considered an effective pedagogical tool for fostering such competences, as they create meaningful, interactive, and context-based learning situations. This article explores the role of didactic games in developing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence in primary school students. It examines the theoretical foundations of sociolinguistic and pragmatic development, the pedagogical potential of didactic games, and the teacher's role in organizing game-based activities. The study highlights that systematically integrated didactic games enhance learners' awareness of social language use, pragmatic meaning, and communicative appropriateness. The findings suggest that didactic games significantly contribute to the development of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence when implemented under appropriate pedagogical conditions.

Introduction. In modern language education, the concept of communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include sociolinguistic and pragmatic dimensions of language use. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts, while pragmatic competence involves understanding implied meanings, speech acts, and communicative intentions (Canale & Swain, 1980). In primary school education, the early development of these competences plays a vital role in shaping learners' communicative behavior and social interaction.

Primary school learners are in a formative stage of cognitive, social, and linguistic development. At this stage, learning is most effective when it is interactive, meaningful, and emotionally engaging (Vygotsky, 1978). However, traditional teacher-centered approaches

often focus primarily on linguistic forms, providing limited opportunities for learners to practice socially appropriate language use. As a result, there is a growing need for instructional methods that promote authentic communication and contextual language practice.

Didactic games offer a powerful solution to this challenge. By simulating real-life communicative situations, games allow learners to practice language within specific social roles and pragmatic contexts (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2006). Therefore, this article aims to analyze the role of didactic games in developing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence in primary school students and to identify the pedagogical conditions necessary for their effective implementation.

Main Part. Sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence are essential components of communicative competence, as they enable learners to select appropriate language forms based on social relationships, cultural norms, and communicative goals (Hymes, 1972). In primary education, these competences are developed gradually through interaction, imitation, and contextualized language use. Didactic games support this process by creating structured yet flexible environments for communication.

One of the key advantages of didactic games is their ability to provide contextualized language practice. Role-play games, for instance, allow learners to assume different social roles such as teacher, student, shopkeeper, or customer. Through these roles, learners practice forms of politeness, greetings, requests, and apologies, which are central to sociolinguistic competence (Harmer, 2007). Such activities help learners understand how language changes depending on social status, familiarity, and setting.

Pragmatic competence is closely related to learners' ability to interpret meaning beyond literal language. Didactic games such as problem-solving tasks and information-gap activities require learners to infer meaning, respond appropriately, and achieve communicative goals through cooperation (Canale & Swain, 1980). These games promote the use of speech acts, turn-taking strategies, and conversational norms, which are fundamental to pragmatic development.

The teacher's role is crucial in guiding learners' sociolinguistic and pragmatic development through games. Teacher competence includes selecting suitable games, modeling appropriate language use, and providing feedback on communicative appropriateness rather than solely on grammatical accuracy (Shulman, 1987). Teachers must also create a supportive classroom atmosphere where learners feel comfortable experimenting with language and making mistakes (Vygotsky, 1978).

Table 1. The Role of Didactic Games in Developing Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence in Primary School Students

Type of Didactic Game	Main Activity Focus	Developed Sociolinguistic Skills	Developed Pragmatic Skills
Role-play games	Enacting social roles (teacher-student, shopkeeper-customer)	Use of speech etiquette, forms of address, awareness of social distance	Speech acts (requests, offers, apologies), context-appropriate responses
Information-	Exchanging and obtaining	Cooperative	Meaning negotiation,

Type of Didactic Game	Main Activity Focus	Developed Sociolinguistic Skills	Developed Pragmatic Skills
gap games	missing information	interaction, turn-taking, active listening	questioning and responding strategies
Problem-solving games	Collaborative completion of situational tasks	Group interaction, understanding social roles	Goal-oriented communication, interpretation of implied meaning
Linguistic board games	Working with words and expressions	Awareness of language norms and stylistic appropriateness	Context-appropriate vocabulary choice
Physical (action-based) didactic games	Following commands and instructions	Understanding social directives and classroom norms	Pragmatic interpretation of commands and instructions

This table systematizes the functional role of didactic games in fostering sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence among primary school learners. As illustrated, each type of didactic game contributes not only to linguistic development but also to the acquisition of social and communicative norms essential for effective language use.

In particular, **role-play games** enable learners to practice language in socially meaningful contexts by assuming different roles. Through this process, learners develop awareness of social status, interpersonal relationships, and appropriate forms of address, which are central to sociolinguistic competence. At the same time, role-play activities enhance pragmatic competence by encouraging the correct use of speech acts such as requests, apologies, and invitations.

Information-gap and **problem-solving games** promote learners' ability to infer meaning, negotiate understanding, and achieve communicative goals collaboratively. These activities foster pragmatic skills by requiring learners to interpret implied meanings and select appropriate communicative strategies based on context and purpose.

Furthermore, **linguistic board games** and **physical didactic games** are particularly effective for young learners, as they combine cognitive engagement with interaction. Such games support the development of contextual language awareness and pragmatic understanding of commands and instructions, which are essential components of classroom communication.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that didactic games function as a comprehensive pedagogical tool for developing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. When systematically integrated into primary language instruction, they significantly enhance learners' communicative appropriateness, social awareness, and confidence in language use.

Pedagogical conditions significantly influence the effectiveness of didactic games. A learner-centered environment that encourages interaction and reflection enhances learners' awareness of social language norms (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Post-game reflection, in

which learners discuss how and why certain expressions were used, further strengthens pragmatic understanding (Bruner, 1986). Additionally, systematic integration of games into lesson objectives ensures continuity and meaningful learning outcomes (Scrivener, 2011).

Conclusion. In conclusion, didactic games play a significant role in developing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence in primary school students. By providing meaningful, context-based, and interactive learning experiences, games enable learners to practice socially appropriate language use and pragmatic strategies. The effectiveness of didactic games depends largely on teacher competence and the pedagogical conditions under which they are implemented.

When didactic games are systematically integrated into the learning process, they contribute not only to linguistic development but also to learners' social awareness and communicative confidence (Harmer, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the use of didactic games should be regarded as an essential component of communicative language teaching in primary education, particularly for fostering sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence.

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