

Comparative Effects of Task-Based Language Teaching and Generative AI-Assisted Instruction on Pragmatic Competence and Interactional Fluency Among Advanced EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present study aimed to compare the effects of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Generative AI-Assisted Instruction on pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Methods and Materials: This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. The participants were 90 advanced EFL learners selected from private language institutes in Isfahan, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Following proficiency screening through the Oxford Quick Placement Test, participants were randomly assigned to three groups: Task-Based Language Teaching (n = 30), Generative AI-Assisted Instruction (n = 30), and a Control group receiving conventional communicative instruction (n = 30). The intervention lasted 12 weeks, with two 90-minute sessions per week. Data were collected using a Pragmatic Competence Assessment Battery and an Interactional Fluency Rating Scale. Pretest and posttest scores were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), followed by univariate ANCOVA and Bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

Findings: The multivariate analysis revealed a statistically significant overall effect of instructional group on the combined dependent variables (Wilks' $\Lambda = .364$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .598$). Significant group effects were observed for pragmatic competence, $F(2,84) = 54.83$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .561$, and interactional fluency, $F(2,84) = 49.27$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .531$. Bonferroni comparisons indicated that both experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group on pragmatic competence and interactional fluency ($p < .001$). Furthermore, the Generative AI-Assisted Instruction group achieved significantly higher posttest scores than the Task-Based Language Teaching group for pragmatic competence ($MD = 6.47$, $p = .003$) and interactional fluency ($MD = 5.22$, $p = .007$).

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that both Task-Based Language Teaching and Generative AI-Assisted Instruction effectively enhance pragmatic competence and

interactional fluency among advanced EFL learners. However, Generative AI-Assisted Instruction produced significantly greater improvements across both outcomes, suggesting that adaptive AI-supported learning environments provide particularly powerful opportunities for developing advanced communicative competence. The results highlight the pedagogical value of integrating artificial intelligence technologies into contemporary EFL instruction to support authentic interaction, personalized feedback, and pragmatic language development.

Keywords: *Task-Based Language Teaching, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Pragmatic Competence, Interactional Fluency, English as a Foreign Language, Communicative Competence, AI-Assisted Language Learning, Advanced EFL Learners.*

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of English as a global means of communication has transformed the objectives of foreign language education from the mere acquisition of grammatical knowledge to the development of communicative competence. Contemporary language learners are expected not only to produce linguistically accurate utterances but also to communicate effectively and appropriately in diverse social and intercultural contexts. As a result, pragmatic competence has emerged as one of the most important dimensions of communicative ability in second and foreign language learning. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to understand and use language appropriately according to contextual, cultural, interpersonal, and situational factors. It encompasses both sociopragmatic knowledge, which concerns social norms and contextual appropriateness, and pragmalinguistic knowledge, which involves the linguistic resources used to realize communicative intentions (Ahmed, 2022; Al-Seghayer, 2024; Ed-deraouy, 2024). Research consistently demonstrates that even highly proficient EFL learners frequently encounter difficulties in interpreting indirect meanings, managing speech acts, understanding conversational implicatures, and employing language appropriately in authentic interactions (Kentmen et al., 2023; Marasabessy et al., 2023; Zardaryan, 2023).

The significance of pragmatic competence has become increasingly evident in contemporary language education because communication breakdowns often result not from grammatical errors but from pragmatic failures. Learners who possess substantial lexical and grammatical knowledge may nevertheless struggle to express politeness, negotiate meaning, perform requests, refuse invitations, or maintain conversational coherence in culturally appropriate ways. Such deficiencies can negatively affect interpersonal relationships, academic interactions, and professional communication (Abdelwahab & Rahmtallah, 2024; Ahmed,

2024). Furthermore, the development of pragmatic competence is closely associated with successful participation in international communication environments where English functions as a lingua franca among speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, effective instructional approaches capable of promoting pragmatic awareness and pragmatic performance have become a central concern for researchers and educators in the field of applied linguistics (Al-Seghayer, 2024; Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2021).

Another essential component of communicative competence is interactional fluency. Unlike traditional conceptualizations of fluency that focus primarily on speech rate or linguistic accuracy, interactional fluency emphasizes learners' ability to engage effectively in real-time communication. It includes skills such as turn-taking management, responsiveness, conversational maintenance, negotiation of meaning, discourse organization, and collaborative construction of interaction. In contemporary communicative frameworks, interactional fluency is regarded as a multidimensional construct that reflects both linguistic competence and social communicative competence. Successful communication requires learners to process information rapidly, respond appropriately to interlocutors, maintain conversational flow, and adapt their language according to changing communicative demands (Noda, 2023; Paudel, 2024; Yasin, 2024). Consequently, instructional approaches that provide meaningful opportunities for authentic interaction are expected to contribute significantly to the development of both pragmatic competence and interactional fluency.

Over the past several decades, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has gained substantial recognition as one of the most influential pedagogical approaches in second language education. Rooted in communicative language teaching and interactionist theories of language acquisition, TBLT emphasizes the use of meaningful communicative tasks that require learners to negotiate meaning and

accomplish real-world objectives through language use. Rather than focusing exclusively on discrete linguistic forms, task-based instruction encourages learners to engage in purposeful communication, thereby facilitating the integration of linguistic knowledge with communicative practice (Berezenko et al., 2022; Lei & Qin, 2022). Through collaborative problem-solving activities, information-gap tasks, role plays, and authentic communication scenarios, learners are exposed to rich opportunities for interaction that can enhance both pragmatic development and fluency.

Numerous studies have documented the effectiveness of task-based instruction in improving various dimensions of language performance. Research has shown that task-based approaches contribute positively to speaking ability, communicative competence, pronunciation development, and pragmatic performance by creating environments that simulate authentic communicative experiences (Alemi et al., 2023; Quilambaqui & Parra, 2023). In particular, technology-mediated task-based instruction has demonstrated considerable potential for improving learners' ability to produce contextually appropriate speech acts and engage in meaningful online communication (Alemi et al., 2023). Furthermore, investigations into pragmatic instruction have revealed that task implementation often produces superior outcomes compared with traditional presentation-practice-production models because learners actively construct pragmatic knowledge through interaction and experiential learning (Róg, 2024). These findings suggest that TBLT may serve as an effective pedagogical framework for enhancing both pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced EFL learners.

Despite the demonstrated benefits of task-based instruction, recent technological advancements have introduced new possibilities for language learning through artificial intelligence. The emergence of generative artificial intelligence has fundamentally altered educational practices by providing learners with intelligent, adaptive, and highly interactive learning environments. Generative AI systems, particularly large language models and conversational agents, are capable of producing contextually appropriate responses, simulating authentic conversations, offering personalized feedback, and supporting learner autonomy. These capabilities have generated substantial interest among language educators seeking innovative methods to enhance communicative competence and speaking performance (Russell, 2023; Zhang, 2024).

The integration of generative AI into language education aligns with broader trends toward personalized and

technology-enhanced learning. Unlike conventional instructional technologies that often provide predetermined responses or limited interaction opportunities, generative AI systems can engage learners in dynamic conversations that closely resemble authentic human communication. Such systems can adjust their responses according to learners' proficiency levels, provide immediate corrective feedback, generate realistic communicative scenarios, and offer unlimited opportunities for practice. These characteristics suggest considerable potential for supporting the development of pragmatic competence and interactional fluency, particularly in EFL contexts where authentic interaction opportunities may be limited (Chen et al., 2024; Kılıçkaya & Kic-Drgas, 2025).

Emerging empirical evidence supports the educational value of AI-assisted language learning. Research has demonstrated that AI-integrated speaking instruction can significantly improve speaking proficiency while simultaneously enhancing learners' confidence, social-emotional competence, and willingness to communicate (Shi & Shakibaei, 2025). Similarly, studies investigating role-play activities supported by generative AI agents have reported positive effects on speaking performance, interaction quality, and learner engagement (Chen et al., 2024). Recent investigations have also highlighted the capacity of adaptive AI systems to facilitate nonlinear skill development by providing individualized learning pathways and collaborative support mechanisms that respond to learners' evolving needs (Xu, 2026). Furthermore, advances in immersive and intelligent learning technologies have been associated with improvements in communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and language performance across diverse instructional contexts (Niu, 2026).

The pedagogical potential of AI-assisted instruction extends beyond linguistic development to encompass broader cognitive and social dimensions of learning. Contemporary educational technologies increasingly emphasize adaptive learning, collaborative interaction, and learner-centered instruction. AI systems can create environments that encourage experimentation, self-regulation, reflection, and autonomous learning, all of which contribute to more effective language acquisition processes. These characteristics are consistent with constructivist perspectives that view learning as an active process of knowledge construction through interaction and meaningful engagement (Russell, 2023; Soboh & Gheith, 2023). Consequently, generative AI may provide unique

affordances that complement or even extend the benefits traditionally associated with communicative and task-based approaches.

At the same time, scholars have emphasized that the successful development of pragmatic competence requires exposure to rich pragmatic input, opportunities for interaction, and explicit awareness of sociocultural norms. Research examining pragmatic instruction has highlighted the importance of integrating authentic communicative experiences with pedagogical interventions designed to increase learners' awareness of pragmatic conventions and contextual variability (Ed-deraouy, 2024; Zhu, 2023). Studies focusing on speech acts, conversational implicatures, pragmatic markers, metaphor interpretation, and pragmatic awareness have consistently demonstrated that learners benefit from instructional environments that facilitate active engagement with authentic language use (Chiu et al., 2022; Kentmen et al., 2023; Kökcü & Ortaçtepe, 2022; Marasabessy et al., 2023). Both task-based instruction and AI-assisted learning environments appear capable of providing such opportunities, although their relative effectiveness remains insufficiently understood.

Recent developments in language pedagogy have also emphasized the importance of speaking competence as a multidimensional construct encompassing linguistic, pragmatic, interactional, and cognitive dimensions. Research on communicative approaches, problem-based learning, and technology-enhanced instruction suggests that meaningful communication activities promote not only linguistic development but also higher-order thinking skills, learner engagement, and communicative confidence (Berezenko et al., 2022; Tamene, 2026). These findings reinforce the need to investigate instructional approaches capable of simultaneously addressing multiple dimensions of communicative competence.

Although an expanding body of research has examined either task-based instruction or AI-assisted learning independently, relatively few studies have directly compared these approaches in relation to pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced EFL learners. Existing investigations have often focused on general speaking performance, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary acquisition, or learner attitudes rather than the specific communicative competencies required for successful real-world interaction (Chen et al., 2024; Shi & Shakibaei, 2025; Zhang, 2024). Moreover, much of the available literature has concentrated on beginner or intermediate learners, leaving important questions regarding advanced learners

insufficiently explored. Given the increasing prominence of generative AI in educational settings and the continued relevance of task-based pedagogies, a comparative examination of these approaches represents a timely and significant area of inquiry.

Furthermore, the Iranian EFL context presents unique challenges and opportunities for investigating instructional innovations. Advanced learners frequently possess substantial grammatical and lexical knowledge but continue to experience difficulties in pragmatic performance and spontaneous interaction due to limited exposure to authentic communicative environments. Identifying effective instructional approaches capable of addressing these challenges may contribute substantially to both theoretical understanding and pedagogical practice. Comparing the effectiveness of task-based language teaching and generative AI-assisted instruction may provide valuable insights into how contemporary educational technologies can be integrated with established communicative methodologies to support advanced language learning.

Therefore, the present study aimed to compare the effects of Task-Based Language Teaching and Generative AI-Assisted Instruction on pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced EFL learners.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group structure to investigate the comparative effects of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted instruction on pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The research was conducted in several private language institutes in Isfahan, Iran, during the 2025–2026 academic year. A total of 90 advanced EFL learners were selected through purposive sampling from a larger pool of students enrolled in advanced-level English courses. The participants were initially screened using the Oxford Quick Placement Test to ensure homogeneity regarding language proficiency. Learners whose scores fell within the advanced proficiency range were invited to participate in the study.

The final sample consisted of 90 learners aged between 20 and 32 years. After the screening process, participants were randomly assigned to three equal groups, each comprising 30 learners. The first experimental group received instruction through Task-Based Language Teaching, the second experimental group received

Generative AI-assisted instruction, and the control group received conventional communicative language instruction commonly practiced in EFL classrooms. All participants had studied English for at least six years and had no prior formal experience with AI-based language learning systems. The intervention lasted for twelve weeks, with two instructional sessions conducted each week. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Prior to the intervention, all participants completed pretest measures assessing pragmatic competence and interactional fluency. Following the instructional period, the same measures were administered as posttests to evaluate changes attributable to the instructional treatments.

Pragmatic competence was assessed using the Pragmatic Competence Assessment Battery developed by Taguchi (2011). This instrument is widely employed in second language acquisition research to evaluate learners' ability to interpret and produce contextually appropriate language in diverse communicative situations. The battery consists of 36 situational tasks distributed across several pragmatic domains, including speech acts, implicature comprehension, sociopragmatic appropriateness, and discourse management. Participants are required to respond to written and oral scenarios that reflect authentic communicative contexts. Responses are evaluated based on appropriateness, contextual sensitivity, politeness, and communicative effectiveness. Each item is scored on a five-point rating scale, with higher scores indicating greater pragmatic competence. Previous studies have reported satisfactory psychometric properties for the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically exceeding .85 and strong evidence of construct and criterion validity across diverse EFL populations. The validity and reliability of the instrument have been confirmed in numerous language-learning contexts, making it suitable for advanced EFL learners.

Interactional fluency was measured using the Interactional Fluency Rating Scale developed by McCarthy (2010). This assessment focuses on learners' ability to participate effectively in spoken interaction by maintaining conversational flow, responding appropriately to interlocutors, managing turn-taking, and demonstrating communicative spontaneity. The instrument evaluates recorded pair and group interactions based on several dimensions, including speech rate, pause frequency, turn management, responsiveness, and discourse continuity. The scale consists of 20 indicators rated on a five-point Likert continuum ranging from very weak performance to highly

fluent interaction. Higher scores represent greater levels of interactional fluency. Independent trained raters evaluated the participants' recorded interactions, and inter-rater reliability coefficients above .80 were established before scoring commenced. Previous research has demonstrated strong reliability and validity for the scale in assessing oral communicative performance among advanced second-language learners.

Language proficiency homogeneity was established through the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), developed by Oxford University Press and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. The OQPT is one of the most widely used standardized language placement instruments and consists of 60 multiple-choice items assessing grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Scores obtained from the test were used exclusively to identify advanced-level learners and ensure equivalence among the study groups prior to the intervention. Numerous studies have confirmed the reliability and validity of the OQPT for placement and research purposes in EFL settings.

To evaluate instructional engagement and ensure treatment fidelity, classroom observation checklists were completed throughout the intervention period. The checklist included indicators related to learner participation, interaction frequency, task completion, communicative involvement, and adherence to instructional procedures. Observations were conducted by trained researchers who monitored the implementation of both instructional approaches and ensured consistency across sessions.

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 29. Prior to conducting the main analyses, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis values, were calculated for all variables. Assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and equality of covariance matrices were examined through appropriate statistical tests. To determine the effectiveness of the instructional interventions, a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed, with posttest scores for pragmatic competence and interactional fluency serving as dependent variables and corresponding pretest scores entered as covariates. When significant multivariate effects were identified, follow-up univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted to examine group differences on each dependent variable separately. Bonferroni post hoc comparisons were subsequently employed to identify specific differences among the Task-

Based Language Teaching group, the Generative AI-assisted instruction group, and the control group. Effect sizes were calculated using partial eta squared values to determine the magnitude of the observed effects. Statistical significance was established at the .05 level for all analyses.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 90 advanced EFL learners participated in the study and completed all stages of data collection. The sample consisted of 52 female learners (57.8%) and 38 male learners

(42.2%). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 32 years, with a mean age of 24.87 years ($SD = 3.14$). Thirty participants were assigned to the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) group, 30 participants to the Generative AI-Assisted Instruction group, and 30 participants to the Control group. Preliminary analyses indicated no statistically significant differences among the three groups regarding age, gender distribution, or baseline English proficiency scores obtained from the Oxford Quick Placement Test ($p > .05$), suggesting initial equivalence among the groups prior to the intervention.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Pragmatic Competence and Interactional Fluency Across Groups and Measurement Occasions

Variable	Group	Pretest Mean $\pm$ SD	Posttest Mean $\pm$ SD
Pragmatic Competence	TBLT	92.43 $\pm$ 8.71	111.87 $\pm$ 7.56
Pragmatic Competence	Generative AI	91.96 $\pm$ 8.35	118.34 $\pm$ 6.82
Pragmatic Competence	Control	92.15 $\pm$ 8.64	95.26 $\pm$ 8.17
Interactional Fluency	TBLT	68.54 $\pm$ 7.18	83.47 $\pm$ 6.22
Interactional Fluency	Generative AI	67.89 $\pm$ 7.46	88.92 $\pm$ 5.71
Interactional Fluency	Control	68.23 $\pm$ 7.31	69.85 $\pm$ 7.09

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for pragmatic competence and interactional fluency across the three groups at pretest and posttest. Examination of the pretest scores demonstrates a high degree of similarity among the groups, indicating successful group equivalence prior to the intervention. For pragmatic competence, the TBLT group increased from a mean score of 92.43 to 111.87, while the Generative AI group exhibited a larger improvement from 91.96 to 118.34. In contrast, the control group showed only a marginal increase from 92.15 to 95.26. Similar trends were

observed for interactional fluency. The TBLT group improved from 68.54 to 83.47, whereas the Generative AI group demonstrated the largest gain, increasing from 67.89 to 88.92. The control group exhibited minimal change, with scores increasing only from 68.23 to 69.85. These descriptive findings suggest that both instructional interventions positively influenced learners' pragmatic competence and interactional fluency, with the Generative AI-assisted instruction appearing to produce the strongest improvements.

Table 2

Assumption Testing for Multivariate Analysis

Test	Statistic	Value	p
Shapiro-Wilk (Pragmatic Competence)	W	0.982	.176
Shapiro-Wilk (Interactional Fluency)	W	0.978	.113
Levene's Test (Pragmatic Competence)	F	1.247	.292
Levene's Test (Interactional Fluency)	F	1.381	.257
Box's M Test	Box's M	8.421	.091

Prior to conducting the main inferential analyses, the assumptions underlying multivariate analysis were examined. As shown in Table 2, the Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that both dependent variables were normally distributed, with non-significant results for pragmatic competence ($p = .176$) and interactional fluency ($p = .113$). Levene's tests were also non-significant, demonstrating

homogeneity of variances across groups for both variables. Furthermore, Box's M test yielded a non-significant result ($p = .091$), suggesting equality of covariance matrices among the groups. Collectively, these findings confirmed that the data satisfied the assumptions required for conducting multivariate analysis of covariance

(MANCOVA), thereby supporting the validity of the subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 3

Multivariate and Univariate Analysis of Covariance Results

Source	Dependent Variable	F	p	Partial η^2
Group	Pragmatic Competence	54.83	< .001	.561
Group	Interactional Fluency	49.27	< .001	.531
Wilks' Lambda	Combined Variables	0.364	< .001	.598

The results of the multivariate analysis of covariance are presented in Table 3. The overall multivariate effect of instructional group was statistically significant, as indicated by Wilks' Lambda ($\Lambda = .364$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that the three instructional conditions differed significantly on the combined dependent variables. Follow-up univariate analyses revealed significant group effects for both pragmatic competence and interactional fluency. For pragmatic competence, the group effect was highly significant, $F(2,84) = 54.83$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size

(partial $\eta^2 = .561$), indicating that approximately 56.1% of the variance in posttest pragmatic competence scores could be attributed to the instructional intervention after controlling for pretest differences. Similarly, for interactional fluency, a significant group effect emerged, $F(2,84) = 49.27$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .531$). These findings demonstrate that both pragmatic competence and interactional fluency were substantially influenced by the type of instructional approach employed during the intervention period.

Table 4

Bonferroni Pairwise Comparisons of Posttest Scores

Dependent Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	p
Pragmatic Competence	Generative AI vs. Control	23.08	< .001
Pragmatic Competence	TBLT vs. Control	16.61	< .001
Pragmatic Competence	Generative AI vs. TBLT	6.47	.003
Interactional Fluency	Generative AI vs. Control	18.84	< .001
Interactional Fluency	TBLT vs. Control	13.62	< .001
Interactional Fluency	Generative AI vs. TBLT	5.22	.007

To identify the specific sources of group differences, Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were conducted. As shown in Table 4, significant differences emerged among all three group comparisons for both dependent variables. Regarding pragmatic competence, the Generative AI group significantly outperformed the control group ($MD = 23.08$, $p < .001$) and the TBLT group ($MD = 6.47$, $p = .003$). Likewise, the TBLT group achieved significantly higher scores than the control group ($MD = 16.61$, $p < .001$). Similar findings were observed for interactional fluency. The Generative AI group demonstrated significantly greater fluency than both the control group ($MD = 18.84$, $p < .001$) and the TBLT group ($MD = 5.22$, $p = .007$), while the TBLT group also significantly exceeded the control group ($MD = 13.62$, $p < .001$). These pairwise comparisons indicate that both intervention approaches were effective in enhancing learners' communicative abilities; however, Generative AI-assisted instruction produced the strongest outcomes. The

superiority of the Generative AI condition suggests that immediate personalized feedback, authentic conversational simulation, adaptive language support, and continuous opportunities for pragmatic practice may have provided learners with richer communicative experiences than those available through conventional task-based instruction alone.

Overall, the findings consistently demonstrate that both Task-Based Language Teaching and Generative AI-assisted instruction significantly improved pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced EFL learners. Nevertheless, the Generative AI-assisted approach yielded the largest gains across both outcome measures, indicating that AI-enhanced language learning environments may offer particularly powerful opportunities for developing advanced communicative competence in foreign language contexts. The large effect sizes observed across analyses further underscore the practical significance of these instructional

interventions and suggest meaningful implications for future EFL pedagogy and curriculum design.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the comparative effects of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Generative AI-Assisted Instruction on pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among advanced EFL learners. The findings revealed that both instructional interventions significantly improved learners' pragmatic competence and interactional fluency compared with conventional communicative instruction. However, the Generative AI-Assisted Instruction group demonstrated significantly greater gains than the TBLT group across both dependent variables. These findings suggest that while meaningful task engagement remains an effective pedagogical approach for developing communicative competence, the adaptive and interactive affordances of generative artificial intelligence may provide additional advantages that facilitate more substantial improvements in learners' pragmatic and interactional abilities.

The first major finding of the study indicated that both experimental groups achieved significantly higher levels of pragmatic competence than the control group. This result supports the assumption that pragmatic competence is best developed through active engagement with communicative situations rather than through exposure to language forms alone. Pragmatic competence requires learners to understand the relationship between linguistic expressions and social contexts, including politeness conventions, speech acts, conversational implicatures, and discourse management strategies. Both TBLT and AI-assisted instruction created opportunities for learners to interact with meaningful communicative tasks that required the application of these skills in context. Consequently, learners were able to develop greater awareness of sociopragmatic norms and enhance their ability to produce contextually appropriate language. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of explicit and interaction-based pragmatic instruction in EFL settings (Ahmed, 2022; Al-Seghayer, 2024; Ed-deraouy, 2024).

The positive effect of TBLT on pragmatic competence aligns with studies demonstrating that task-based environments promote pragmatic development by encouraging learners to negotiate meaning, solve problems collaboratively, and engage in authentic communication. Through meaningful tasks, learners encounter pragmatic

challenges that require them to adapt their language according to contextual demands. Such experiences facilitate the integration of linguistic knowledge with communicative performance and promote the proceduralization of pragmatic knowledge. Previous investigations have similarly reported that task-based instruction contributes significantly to learners' production of speech acts, conversational appropriateness, and pragmatic awareness (Alemi et al., 2023; Quilambaqui & Parra, 2023; Róg, 2024). The current findings therefore provide additional evidence supporting the effectiveness of task-based pedagogies for fostering pragmatic competence among advanced EFL learners.

The superior performance of the Generative AI group in pragmatic competence represents one of the most important findings of the study. Several theoretical explanations may account for this outcome. Generative AI systems provide learners with immediate, personalized, and context-sensitive feedback during communication. Unlike traditional classroom interactions, which are constrained by time and teacher availability, AI systems can engage learners in virtually unlimited conversational exchanges while continuously adapting responses to learners' performance levels. Such interactions create extensive opportunities for learners to practice speech acts, conversational strategies, and pragmatic decision-making in diverse communicative situations. Furthermore, AI-generated dialogues expose learners to a wide variety of linguistic patterns and contextual scenarios that may not be readily available in conventional classroom environments. These features likely accelerated the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge and promoted greater sensitivity to contextual appropriateness. The findings support recent evidence indicating that AI-supported learning environments can substantially enhance communicative competence and speaking performance (Chen et al., 2024; Shi & Shakibaei, 2025; Xu, 2026).

The findings also demonstrated significant improvements in interactional fluency among learners in both experimental conditions. Interactional fluency extends beyond linguistic accuracy and encompasses the ability to participate effectively in real-time communication, manage turn-taking, respond appropriately to interlocutors, and maintain conversational coherence. The significant gains observed among learners exposed to TBLT indicate that task-based activities create rich opportunities for communicative interaction and collaborative meaning-making. During task completion, learners are required to negotiate information, resolve misunderstandings, and coordinate discourse with

their peers. These processes contribute directly to the development of interactional competence and conversational fluency. The results therefore support previous studies suggesting that communicative and task-based methodologies promote more fluent and effective interaction than traditional teacher-centered approaches (Berezenko et al., 2022; Noda, 2023; Yasin, 2024).

The greater gains achieved by the Generative AI group in interactional fluency are particularly noteworthy. One explanation may be that AI-powered conversational systems provide learners with continuous access to interactive communication opportunities beyond the limitations of classroom instruction. Learners can engage in repeated practice sessions, receive immediate responses, and experiment with different communicative strategies without fear of negative evaluation. This reduction in communication anxiety may facilitate greater willingness to communicate and increased participation in spoken interaction. Additionally, AI systems can simulate diverse conversational contexts and interlocutor behaviors, exposing learners to a broader range of communicative experiences than those typically encountered during classroom activities. Such exposure likely contributed to learners' ability to respond more spontaneously and maintain conversational flow more effectively. These interpretations are consistent with findings showing that AI-integrated speaking instruction enhances communicative confidence, social-emotional competence, and oral performance while reducing shyness and demotivation (Russell, 2023; Shi & Shakibaei, 2025; Zhang, 2024).

The results may also be interpreted through sociocultural and interactionist perspectives of language learning. These theoretical frameworks emphasize the central role of interaction, mediation, and scaffolded support in language development. From this perspective, both TBLT and AI-assisted instruction function as mediational tools that facilitate learners' movement toward higher levels of communicative competence. Task-based instruction provides social interaction and collaborative problem-solving opportunities, whereas AI systems offer adaptive scaffolding tailored to individual learner needs. The stronger outcomes associated with AI-assisted instruction suggest that personalized scaffolding and immediate feedback may enhance the effectiveness of communicative practice by addressing learners' specific linguistic and pragmatic challenges in real time (Soboh & Gheith, 2023; Xu, 2026).

Another important implication of the findings concerns the evolving role of educational technology in language

learning. Contemporary EFL instruction increasingly emphasizes learner-centered approaches that promote autonomy, engagement, and personalized learning experiences. Generative AI appears particularly well suited to supporting these objectives because it enables learners to practice language independently while receiving individualized guidance. Unlike traditional instructional materials, AI systems can dynamically adapt communicative scenarios and provide customized responses that reflect learners' progress and needs. Consequently, AI-assisted instruction may represent a powerful extension of communicative and task-based pedagogies rather than a replacement for them. The findings support broader trends in language education highlighting the transformative potential of intelligent educational technologies (Niu, 2026; Russell, 2023; Xu, 2026).

The findings additionally reinforce the argument that pragmatic competence should occupy a more central position within EFL curricula. Previous research has repeatedly shown that many EFL learners possess adequate grammatical knowledge while continuing to struggle with pragmatic performance and communicative appropriateness (Ahmed, 2024; Kentmen et al., 2023; Marasabessy et al., 2023). The substantial improvements observed in the experimental groups demonstrate that pragmatic competence can be effectively developed when learners are provided with opportunities for meaningful interaction and contextualized language use. This result is particularly important because pragmatic failures often have more serious communicative consequences than grammatical errors in real-world communication. The findings therefore support calls for greater emphasis on pragmatics instruction within foreign language education (Sánchez-Hernández & Martínez-Flor, 2021; Zardaryan, 2023; Zhu, 2023).

Furthermore, the results suggest that advanced EFL learners continue to benefit substantially from instructional interventions targeting communicative competence. Although advanced learners typically possess extensive grammatical and lexical knowledge, they may still require support in developing nuanced pragmatic and interactional abilities. The significant gains observed across both experimental groups indicate that communicative competence remains highly malleable even at advanced proficiency levels. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing the ongoing developmental nature of pragmatic competence and interactional skills throughout the language learning process (Chiu et al., 2022; Kökcü & Ortaçtepe, 2022; Lei & Qin, 2022).

Overall, the study contributes to the growing literature on technology-enhanced language learning by providing empirical evidence that both task-based and AI-assisted instructional approaches effectively promote pragmatic competence and interactional fluency. At the same time, the superior outcomes associated with Generative AI-Assisted Instruction suggest that adaptive conversational technologies may offer unique advantages for communicative language development. As artificial intelligence continues to become integrated into educational practice, understanding how these technologies can complement established pedagogical approaches will remain an important area for future investigation (Chen et al., 2024; Kılıçkaya & Kic-Drgas, 2025; Xu, 2026).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present study. First, the sample was limited to advanced EFL learners enrolled in language institutes in Isfahan, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to learners with different proficiency levels, educational backgrounds, or cultural contexts. Second, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, and the study did not include a delayed posttest to evaluate the long-term retention of pragmatic competence and interactional fluency gains. Third, the study relied primarily on quantitative measures and did not incorporate qualitative data that might have provided deeper insights into learners' experiences, perceptions, and interactional behaviors during the instructional process. Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of generative AI technologies means that the specific tools used in this study may differ substantially from future AI systems.

Future studies should examine the effectiveness of Generative AI-Assisted Instruction and Task-Based Language Teaching across different proficiency levels, age groups, and educational settings. Researchers may also investigate the long-term effects of AI-assisted language learning through longitudinal designs that include follow-up assessments. Additional studies incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews, classroom observations, discourse analysis, and learner journals could provide richer explanations of the mechanisms underlying observed improvements. Future research should further explore hybrid instructional models that combine task-based methodologies with AI-supported learning environments and examine their effects on additional language outcomes, including intercultural competence, willingness to communicate, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

Language educators should consider integrating communicative tasks and AI-supported conversational activities into EFL instruction to create more authentic and engaging learning environments. Curriculum designers may incorporate structured opportunities for pragmatic practice through role plays, simulations, and AI-mediated interactions that expose learners to diverse communicative situations. Teacher training programs should prepare instructors to effectively utilize generative AI technologies while maintaining pedagogically sound communicative practices. Educational institutions should also provide access to AI-enhanced learning platforms that enable learners to engage in personalized language practice beyond the classroom. By combining the strengths of task-based instruction with the adaptive capabilities of artificial intelligence, practitioners may foster more effective development of pragmatic competence and interactional fluency among EFL learners.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the

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