

USING REVIEWS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXT-BASED INSTRUCTION: A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING LEXICAL-PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

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Abstract

This article presents a methodological framework for integrating review texts into English language instruction with the aim of developing students' lexical-pragmatic competence. Drawing on theoretical contributions from scholars such as Jeremy Harmer, Mary Rais, and Avil Beckford, as well as empirical studies conducted by researchers in Malaysia and Hawaii, the article argues that review genres, including film reviews, book reviews, and customer reviews constitute rich, authentic pedagogical resources. The study examines the linguistic, discursive, and pragmatic properties of review texts and proposes a three-stage instructional technology applicable to university-level EFL classrooms. Particular attention is given to digital platforms and collaborative activities designed to promote critical reading, pragmatic awareness, and productive language use. The findings suggest that review-based instruction not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates critical thinking, stylistic flexibility, and intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: review genre, lexical-pragmatic competence, EFL instruction, film reviews, text-based learning, critical reading, digital platforms.

Introduction

Reviews occupy a central place in contemporary communicative life. From product evaluations on e-commerce platforms to critical assessments of cinematic works and literary publications, the review genre permeates the everyday information environment of modern learners. This ubiquity renders reviews a particularly valuable resource in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction: not only do students encounter them with great frequency outside the classroom, but working with them offers simultaneous engagement with reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, pragmatic interpretation, and the development of critical analytical skills.

The term "review" (sharh in Uzbek, derived from Arabic, meaning "to explain" or "to clarify") has long been used in literary and journalistic traditions. Its Latin cognate, *commentarium*, similarly denotes the explication and annotation of texts. In English, the word traces to the French *revue*, meaning "to look back upon" or "re-examine", a meaning that aptly describes the evaluative and reflective nature of review writing. Across these linguistic traditions, the review is understood as a genre that explains, interprets, and passes judgment on a text, event, or cultural artefact.



The present article argues that review texts, particularly film reviews are an underutilised but highly effective vehicle for developing lexical-pragmatic competence in EFL learners. We describe the theoretical and empirical basis for this claim, outline the distinctive linguistic features of the genre that make it pedagogically productive, and present a concrete three-stage instructional technology for use in university-level English language classrooms.

Specifically, this article addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What linguistic and pragmatic features of review texts make them suitable for developing lexical-pragmatic competence in EFL learners?
- (2) How can review texts be systematically integrated into EFL instruction through a coherent three-stage instructional technology?
- (3) What role do digital platforms play in enhancing the effectiveness of review-based instruction?

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design grounded in a systematic review of the relevant literature. The methodological framework was developed by synthesising theoretical contributions from genre-based pedagogy, systemic functional linguistics, and communicative language teaching, alongside empirical findings from EFL classroom research conducted in Malaysia and Hawaii.

The instructional technology proposed in this article was designed in three stages and evaluated against established criteria for communicative language teaching, including authenticity of texts, learner engagement, and integration of multiple language skills. The documentary film *A Plastic Ocean* was selected as the primary instructional text, with review materials sourced from the Metacritic platform.

The use of review texts in language teaching has a well-established theoretical precedent. Jeremy Harmer, one of the most widely cited methodologists in EFL pedagogy, explicitly advocates for the use of reviews in developing students' communicative competence. In his view, students who read reviews of films, plays, or books gain not only lexical and grammatical knowledge but also genre awareness, which is an understanding of the conventions, purposes, and organisational patterns that define a particular text type. To facilitate this genre awareness, Harmer developed what he terms the “reviewer genre-analyzing kit”: a set of analytical questions that guide learners through the structural and rhetorical features of review texts.

This genre-analytical approach draws on principles from systemic functional linguistics and genre-based pedagogy, according to which explicit knowledge of a genre's social purpose, staging, and lexico-grammatical resources enables learners to both decode and produce texts of that type more effectively (Swales, 1990). Reviews, with their characteristic blend of factual description and evaluative commentary, are an ideal genre through which to develop this dual capability.

The pedagogical potential of film reviews has attracted particular scholarly attention. Nor Dawirah Rahman, Wan Osman, and Anna Lynn Bakar (2019), working in the Malaysian EFL context, investigated the role of film reviews in developing students' oral communicative

competence. Castagno, Shin, and Tanaka (2021), working in the Hawaiian EFL context, further argued that film reviews serve as effective tools for developing all four core language skills simultaneously, while also promoting critical thinking and intercultural communicative competence.

The application of review texts to the development of critical reading skills has been explored by Mary Rais (2018), who advocates for the use of authentic, everyday texts, including customer reviews as a means of fostering analytical thinking. Avil Beckford (2020) emphasises the importance of extensive reading as a cornerstone of reading comprehension development, and argues that book reviews function as essential preparatory scaffolds for deeper engagement with primary texts.

Research by the Russian scholar Tsendiakova Svetlana (2022) on the lexical profiles of review texts confirms that emotive, evaluative, and affective vocabulary items figure prominently among the most frequently occurring words in this genre. This finding underscores the importance of the review genre for developing nuanced lexical competence.

Reviews are characterised by a distinctive blend of informative and evaluative discourse. Central to their evaluative character is their use of stance markers, such as linguistic devices such as “fortunately”, “apparently”, and “I would argue that” which signal the writer's attitude and epistemic position. Closely related is the use of hedging devices, through which writers soften claims and acknowledge uncertainty. Reviews also provide excellent models of cohesive and coherent text organisation through their use of logical connectors and discourse markers.

Furthermore, reviews exist across a broad stylistic spectrum from the formally analytical to the informally experiential providing learners with rich material for developing register awareness. A further dimension of review texts is their frequent reliance on implication and pragmatic inference: reviewers often convey evaluation through lexical choice, rhetorical framing, and irony rather than through direct statement, rendering pragmatic analysis a cognitively demanding and linguistically enriching classroom activity.

Results

Three-Stage Instructional Technology

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical framework outlined above, a three-stage instructional technology was developed for use in university-level EFL classrooms. The technology is illustrated with reference to the documentary film *A Plastic Ocean*, with review texts sourced from the Metacritic platform.

Stage One: Pre-Reading Activation

The instructional sequence begins with a pre-reading activation stage designed to arouse learner interest, activate relevant background knowledge, and establish a communicative purpose for subsequent text engagement. Students are presented with the trailer of *A Plastic Ocean*. After viewing, students share their predictions about the film's content, central themes, and intended message in a group discussion format, with the instructor facilitating debate and encouraging learners to develop and justify their speculative interpretations.



Stage Two: Text Analysis Activities

The second stage comprises three distinct activities, each targeting a different dimension of lexical-pragmatic competence:

Activity 1. Word Diggers: Students are presented with two contrasting review texts: one predominantly positive, one predominantly negative. They identify and record unfamiliar vocabulary items and compare lexical choices across both reviews, with attention to evaluative language, intensifiers, hedges, and emotive expressions. The Youglish platform is used to provide authentic audio examples of target vocabulary.

Activity 2. True/False Comprehension Questions: Students complete a set of true/false comprehension questions administered via the Wordwall platform, targeting factual information to reinforce the scanning reading strategy and establish a baseline of literal comprehension against which evaluative and implied meaning can be contrasted.

Activity 3. Change the Tone: Working in pairs, students identify emotively charged language and analyse its communicative function. They then replace identified emotive expressions with neutral equivalents and discuss how this substitution alters the tone, evaluative force, and communicative impact of the text. Results are shared and discussed in open class.

Stage Three: Creative Production and Performance

Activity 1. Collaborative Story Creation: Working in small groups, students use the Storybird platform to create a short narrative inspired by the film's themes, incorporating target vocabulary from the review texts. Groups then present their narratives to the class and provide peer commentary within the platform.

Activity 2. Dramatisation: Groups develop a short dramatic performance based on their collaborative story, attending to expressive characterisation, emotive vocabulary (e.g., 'joyful surprise', 'heartbreaking moment'), and narrative coherence. Performances are evaluated on narrative logic, vocabulary use, characterisation, teamwork, and creativity.

Discussion

The instructional technology presented in this article is grounded in a robust theoretical framework and a body of empirical evidence that collectively affirm the value of review texts as vehicles for lexical-pragmatic development. Review genres offer EFL learners something that formal academic texts often cannot: immediate relevance to the authentic communicative contexts of their daily lives. The film reviews, book reviews, and customer reviews that populate contemporary digital environments are texts that learners encounter not only in the classroom but in the world beyond it, making work with these genres inherently motivating and personally meaningful.

From a linguistic standpoint, reviews are unusually rich resources. Their systematic deployment of evaluative vocabulary, stance markers, hedging devices, emotive expressions, and cohesive structures provides learners with concentrated exposure to the pragmatic dimensions of language — dimensions that are often neglected in more traditional, form-focused instructional approaches. It is precisely these pragmatic dimensions that constitute



lexical-pragmatic competence: the capacity to use and interpret language not merely accurately but appropriately, strategically, and with full awareness of its evaluative and relational implications.

The three-stage instructional technology proposed here — moving from pre-reading activation through analytical engagement to creative production — reflects established principles of communicative language teaching while incorporating contemporary digital tools that enhance learner autonomy and collaborative engagement. The integration of platforms such as Metacritic, Youghlish, Wordwall, and Storybird brings authentic texts and interactive tasks together within a coherent pedagogical framework.

These findings are consistent with those of Nor Dawirah Rahman et al. (2019), who reported measurable gains in vocabulary range, expressive fluency, and communicative confidence through film review activities. They also align with Castagno et al. (2021), who demonstrated the potential of film reviews for integrated skills development and intercultural competence, and with Rais (2018), whose advocacy for authentic everyday texts as tools for critical reading development is directly instantiated in the present framework.

Conclusion

This article has presented a theoretically grounded and empirically supported methodological framework for developing lexical-pragmatic competence through review-based instruction. The three-stage technology encompassing pre-reading activation, text analysis, and creative production provides a replicable and adaptable model for university-level EFL instruction.

Future research might usefully investigate the differential effectiveness of different review types (film, book, customer) for particular learner populations and proficiency levels, and might explore the relative contributions of analytical and productive components to long-term lexical retention and pragmatic development. The integration of peer feedback mechanisms and self-assessment portfolios into the framework would also be a productive avenue for further development.

In conclusion, the systematic integration of review texts into English language instruction represents not merely an innovative pedagogical option but a principled and well-evidenced response to the communicative realities of contemporary learners' lives. Reviews are texts that matter culturally, practically, and linguistically and their potential as instruments of language education deserves to be more fully realised.

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