

Research Article

English in Context: A Study of Lexis, Syntax, and Pragmatics in Bahrain's Universities

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Abstract

This contextualized study investigates how English language teachers and university-level learners in the Kingdom of Bahrain perceive the core components of the English language: Lexis, Syntax, and Pragmatics. While English is a critical gateway to global careers and higher education in Bahrain, learner experiences vary significantly between native-like fluency and persistent hesitation. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on survey responses from 80 participants (comprising 40 teachers and 40 students) to map diverse encounters with the language from the learners' and educators' perspectives. The study reveals a notable consensus between both groups: Pragmatics is considered the most essential aspect of language competence, identified as such by 57.5% of teachers and 55% of students. Conversely, Syntax is viewed as the most challenging component to acquire and apply, with 25 teachers and 21 students identifying it as a major cognitive and pedagogical barrier. These findings reflect a shared belief in the importance of context-sensitive communication and vocabulary acquisition through real-life usage, rather than a reliance on traditional grammar drills. The participants' perspectives are examined in relation to several theoretical frameworks, including Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Tomasello's Usage-Based Theory, and Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach. Participants expressed a clear preference for immersion, authentic materials, and "chunk-based" learning over isolated rule memorization. Set within the Bahraini higher education context, the study sheds light on shifting pedagogical priorities and learner expectations. It concludes by calling for a shift toward more communicative, socially situated approaches in English language instruction. The results suggest significant implications for curriculum design, advocating for the integration of pragmatic competence and the repositioning of syntax within meaningful, functional contexts to better support the evolving identities of Bahraini learners.

Keywords

English Language Education, Bahraini Higher Education, Pragmatics, Syntax, Lexical Approach, Usage-based Theory, Second Language Acquisition, Communicative Language Teaching

1. Introduction

For years, I have carried a deep and enduring curiosity; one that resides at the heart of my academic and professional life as an English language educator in Bahrain: How do Bahraini

students truly acquire the English language? What does English mean to them, beyond examinations and coursebooks? How do they perceive its structure, its essence, and its relevance to their

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personal and academic worlds? What strategies, often unseen or unacknowledged, do they deploy to retain, recall, and refine their knowledge of English over time? These questions, intimate and urgent, form the passion that fuels this study.

In Bahrain, where English opens doors to global careers, higher education, and even social media influence, it's crucial to understand not just what students learn, but how and why they make the language their own. Bahrain's students are exposed to English through schooling, media, digital platforms, and daily interactions. Yet their experiences with English vary profoundly: some students embrace the language with confidence and enthusiasm, while others struggle with its unfamiliar grammar and elusive meanings. Some develop native-like fluency; others remain hesitant, unsure, and dependent on translation.

This study arose from a desire to map these diverse encounters with English, not from the top down, but from the learners' and the teachers' own perspectives. What do Bahraini students and English language teachers believe to be the core of the English language? Is it the lexis they use, the syntax they struggle with, or the pragmatics they perform daily without naming it as such? Which of these aspects do they value most? And which do they find most difficult to acquire or apply? Equally, what insights do ELT professionals, who interact daily with these learners, offer in terms of preferred strategies, pedagogical challenges, and evolving learner identities?

The research was designed to bring student voices into conversation with those of teachers. Through two carefully constructed surveys: one for university-level students and general English learners, and another for qualified English teachers across Bahraini higher education institutions, we gathered layered, reflective data on what English means to this generation of learners and educators. This dual-lens design was essential: while learners offer an insider view into their cognitive and affective engagement with English, teachers provide metalinguistic and pedagogical clarity, grounded in years of classroom observation and reflection.

The findings are compelling. Both groups, students and teachers, overwhelmingly perceive Pragmatics, or the context-sensitive use of language, as the most important component of English. This signals a major shift from traditional grammar-focused approaches to one where meaning, appropriateness, and communicative intent are seen as central. However, the most difficult component identified by both groups was Syntax, the grammar and structure that undergird fluent expression but often pose barriers to learner confidence and fluency. This tension between valuing communicative ability and struggling with structural form calls for a re-examination of current teaching practices in Bahrain.

Theoretically, this study draws on a range of contemporary frameworks that explain how language is acquired and internalized. Krashen's Input Hypothesis [1] emphasizes the necessity of comprehensible, meaningful exposure to language, especially in naturalistic, low-anxiety environments. Our participants' repeated references to listening, immersion, and

conversation as key learning strategies strongly align with this view. Similarly, Tomasello's Usage-Based Theory [2] suggests that language learning is not governed by innate grammatical templates, but by the accumulation of usage patterns through interaction, a theory vividly confirmed by learners who favor "real-life speaking" and "contextual listening" over abstract grammar drills.

Another relevant lens is Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach [3], which posits that language is learned in prefabricated chunks rather than isolated vocabulary items or grammar rules. Both students and teachers in this study recommended starting with "basic vocabulary" and "common expressions", not as disconnected word lists, but as usable tools for everyday communication. This approach echoes real-life acquisition processes and supports the idea that fluency emerges from stored phrases, collocations, and formulaic sequences that enable quicker access and application.

Pragmatics is deeply valued by participants. This echoes Grice's Cooperative Principle and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory [4, 5]. According to these perspectives, meaning is co-constructed through social interaction, shaped by cultural expectations, audience awareness, and contextual cues. Learners who can "*adjust their language to different situations*," as several respondents phrased it, are engaging in precisely the kind of sociopragmatic reasoning these theories illuminate. Vygotsky also reminds us that learning is most effective when scaffolded through dialogue and guided participation, something that Bahraini students seem to seek in their preference for speaking tasks, authentic interaction, and teacher feedback.

Of course, Chomsky's Universal Grammar [6] remains influential in formal language instruction, especially regarding syntax. Yet the learners in this study expressed considerable anxiety or difficulty with grammar, even while acknowledging its necessity. Their insights, such as "*I know the rules but don't know when to use them*" or "*I understand the structure but not the usage*", suggest a gap between abstract knowledge and functional application. This disconnect invites us to reconsider how syntax is taught: not as an end in itself, but as a flexible system embedded within purposeful communication.

These findings carry real weight for Bahrain's classrooms. They shape how we design curricula and inspire learners to embrace English with confidence. First, they call for a broader redefinition of what constitutes "language mastery." Rather than prioritizing grammatical accuracy in isolation, pedagogical approaches should foreground communicative competence, lexical fluency, and pragmatic awareness. Second, the study highlights the need to diversify teaching strategies. While grammar remains essential, its instruction must be integrated into meaningful tasks, such as role-plays, simulations, real-life dialogues, and problem-solving scenarios, that reflect how language is actually used outside the classroom.

Furthermore, this research provides valuable insight into learner identity. Bahraini students today are not passive recipients of instruction; they are active agents, capable of articu-

lating their learning styles, cognitive preferences, and emotional responses to English. Some favor visual aids and chunking; others respond to auditory input and storytelling. Many align with Multiple Intelligences Theory [8], preferring linguistic, interpersonal, or musical strategies. Understanding these varied learner profiles can inform more inclusive, differentiated teaching practices that respond to diverse cognitive strengths.

Equally, teachers' reflections, such as advising new learners to focus on vocabulary first, or to learn grammar through immersion, offer grounded, experience-based insights that support the shift toward usage-based and communicative models. Their suggestions, paired with students' preferences, form a dialogic space where language instruction can be reimagined, not through imported models alone, but through locally grounded, contextually aware frameworks.

In essence, this study aims to illuminate how English is lived, learned, and negotiated in the minds and lives of Bahraini learners. It is not merely a study of perceptions, but of perceptions as windows into practice, revealing how theories of language acquisition find their way, in fragmented and full forms, into classrooms, memories, frustrations, and breakthroughs. By centering learner and teacher voices, this study hopes to contribute not just to academic discourse, but to the ongoing evolution of English language pedagogy in Bahrain and beyond.

2. Literature Review

Applied linguistics has long explored how learners acquire English, shifting from a focus on rules to seeing language as a tool for communication and connection. This shift has opened new avenues for exploring how learners, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, experience the process of learning English, what they consider central to language competence, and which strategies they find most effective.

Several theoretical frameworks have shaped contemporary thinking in second language acquisition. Krashen's Input Hypothesis [1] emphasized the role of comprehensible input, language that is slightly beyond the learner's current level but still understandable through context, as essential for natural acquisition. His view challenged traditional grammar-heavy approaches and supported the use of authentic materials and meaningful communication in classrooms. In parallel, Tomasello's Usage-Based Theory [2] proposed that language is acquired through repeated exposure to meaningful usage patterns, not through innate grammatical templates. This theory reflects how learners often absorb language through context, interaction, and intention rather than rule memorization.

A third influential perspective is Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach, which argues that language is best understood as a collection of chunks, collocations, and formulaic expressions [3]. Lewis contended that fluency arises not from constructing sentences word by word using grammatical rules, but from accessing ready-made lexical sequences stored in memory. This

is complemented by Paul Nation's Four Strands Theory, particularly the "Language-Focused Learning" strand, which advocates for deliberate vocabulary instruction alongside authentic usage to ensure learners possess the necessary tools for fluency [8]. Similarly, Grice's Cooperative Principle [4] and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory [5] have highlighted the social nature of language. To further refine the understanding of pragmatic competence, Jenny Thomas [9] distinguishes between pragmatic competence (the knowledge of linguistic resources) and pragmatic performance (the actual application of that knowledge in social interactions). This nuance helps explain why students may "know" rules but struggle to use them. Additionally, Sperber and Wilson's [10] Relevance Theory emphasizes that meaning-making is an inferential process heavily dependent on context, reinforcing why Bahraini learners prioritize pragmatics over isolated syntax.

Within this rich theoretical backdrop, various studies have examined how learners and teachers prioritize components of English, with some suggesting that grammar remains dominant in many curricula, often due to assessment practices and textbook design [11]. Michael Tomasello's Usage-Based Theory [2] further grounds this by arguing that grammar and structure are not innate templates but are learned through the accumulation of real-world usage patterns, aligning with the "usage over drills" preference found in this study. More recent scholarship advocates for a shift toward communicative and usage-based models. For instance, Bardovi-Harlig [12] emphasized the neglect of pragmatics in many EFL contexts, even though it plays a central role in learners' ability to function socially and professionally. Similarly, Nation and Webb [13] stressed the importance of lexical knowledge in reading comprehension and spoken fluency.

Despite these advances, few studies have explored how learners themselves define the "core" of the English language, particularly in the Arab Gulf context. Much of the literature tends to focus on skill acquisition or error analysis, rather than on how learners perceive the weight of syntax, lexis, and pragmatics in their learning journey. Likewise, the alignment between teacher beliefs and student preferences remains an under-examined area, especially in multilingual educational settings such as Bahrain.

This study seeks to contribute to that conversation by examining how Bahraini university students and English teachers perceive the most important, and the most challenging, components of English. It also explores which strategies and techniques learners rely on to develop their language competence, and how these perceptions correlate with established theories of language acquisition. By combining the voices of learners and educators, this study hopes to fill a gap in the literature, one that recognizes perception as a valuable source of pedagogical insight.

Furthermore, while much research has examined either learners' strategies or teacher beliefs, this study brings both into dialogue. Doing so offers a clearer picture of whether classroom practices are aligned with what learners truly need

and value. This is particularly important given the findings of studies like those by Littlewood [14], who stressed the importance of learner autonomy and agency in modern language pedagogy.

In sum, the literature supports a reorientation in language education, from structural to functional, from prescriptive to participatory. Yet there remains a lack of context-specific research exploring how learners and teachers in Bahrain understand the core of English. This study builds on current theoretical models while responding to this local gap, offering a nuanced look into the evolving perceptions and needs of today's English language users.

3. Methodology

The research employed a descriptive, mixed-methods approach to capture both statistical trends and reflective insights from two distinct groups within the Bahraini higher education sector.

The sampling rationale utilized purposive sampling to ensure that all participants possessed direct, daily engagement with English as a medium of instruction or professional practice.

The sample size consisted of 80 participants, specifically 40 university students aged 18–34 and 40 English language teachers, many of whom hold postgraduate degrees in linguistics or education. Selection criteria for students required current enrollment in a Bahraini higher education institution, while teachers were selected based on having at least three years of experience in the local tertiary sector.

Data were collected via two online questionnaires featuring 5-point Likert scales for quantitative trends and open-ended prompts for qualitative depth. To ensure the validation of the instruments, two TEFL experts reviewed the questions for contextual relevance and clarity before deployment.

The data analysis procedure involved a two-stage process: first, quantitative responses were processed using descriptive statistics to calculate frequency and percentages; second, qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in participant reflections.

4. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into how English is perceived and acquired by learners and teachers in Bahrain, it is not without limitations. The sample size, though balanced and purposeful, was relatively small and restricted to higher education contexts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or educational settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data, though rich in reflection, may not always capture unconscious strategies or actual classroom behaviors. Finally, while the study foregrounded participants' voices, future research could benefit from triangulating survey results with classroom observations,

interviews, or learner performance data to deepen the analysis. Despite these limitations, the findings offer a meaningful starting point for more expansive and context-sensitive research in the field of English language education in the region.

5. Main Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the surveys conducted in 2025 across Bahraini higher education settings. Data were gathered from 40 English language teachers and 40 university students (including general language users) via structured online questionnaires. The analysis highlights participants' perceptions of the most important and difficult components of English language learning, alongside suggested strategies. To enhance clarity, findings are organized by participant group, followed by comparisons and theoretical discussions. Quantitative data are summarized with descriptive statistics, and qualitative insights from open-ended responses are integrated for depth.

5.1. Overview of Key Quantitative Findings

Both teachers and students demonstrated a strong consensus on the core elements of English, prioritizing pragmatics while identifying syntax as the primary challenge. Table 1 summarizes the responses for the most important component, and Table 2 for the most difficult.

Table 1. Most Important Component of English Language (Number of Responses and Percentages).

Component	Teachers (n=40)	Students (n=40)
Pragmatics	23 (57.5%)	22 (55%)
Lexis	10 (25%)	6 (15%)
Syntax	7 (17.5%)	12 (30%)

Table 2. Most Difficult Component to Acquire and Apply (Number of Responses).

Component	Teachers (n=40)	Students (n=40)
Syntax	25	21
Pragmatics	11	11
Lexis	4	8

These results indicate a shared valuation of pragmatics; emphasizing contextual and meaningful communication, over structural elements like syntax, despite the latter's perceived

difficulty. This aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, which prioritize functional use over isolated rule mastery.

Participants' open-ended responses further illuminate the broader trends. For instance, one experienced teacher advised: *"To acquire patterns of speech rather than individual words or sets of grammar rules."* This highlights the pedagogical shift toward formulaic language and supports the Lexical Approach [3].

Another teacher reflected: *"Language immersion would be beneficial in their subconscious mind, learning grammar through authentic content... ordering food from a restaurant using second language (L2)..."*. This directly aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis [1] and Long's Focus on Form [15], emphasizing contextual and experiential learning.

Students shared similar views. One respondent succinctly stated: *"Listening skill and speaking skill."* This confirms learners' need for immediate oral engagement, which resonates with Communicative Language Teaching principles and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of mediated learning [5].

Another student remarked: *"You master grammar and vocabulary when you know when and how to use them correctly."* This perception reflects a metalinguistic awareness of pragmatic competence, reinforcing the call for integration between structure and context in teaching.

Such testimonies underscore a practical and theoretical consensus: learning is best fostered when language is treated as a tool for real-life communication rather than a set of abstract rules. Both educators and learners advocate for a more usage-based, interaction-rich model of language education.

5.2. Teachers' Views

Teachers, drawing from their instructional experience in Bahraini contexts, emphasized pragmatics as the essence of English (23/40 responses). As one respondent noted: *"You can know all the grammar rules and still offend someone. Teaching students how to use language appropriately is the real goal."* Lexis ranked second (10/40), while syntax was least prioritized (7/40).

However, syntax was overwhelmingly cited as the most difficult aspect (25/40), followed by pragmatics (11/40) and lexis (4/40). This tension reflects a pedagogical reality: while teachers value communicative competence, grammatical structures pose significant teaching and learning challenges. Theoretically, this resonates with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory [5], where language develops through mediated interactions, and Grice's Cooperative Principle [4], which highlights meaning negotiation beyond literal forms. It also echoes Chomsky's Universal Grammar [6], underscoring syntax as a foundational yet demanding element, best addressed via Focus on Form [15] within CLT frameworks.

5.3. Students' Views

Students' responses, drawn from daily experiences with

English in lectures, media, exams, and interactions, were honest and reflective, contrasting with more theoretical views.

A majority of 22 out of 40 (55%) identified Pragmatics as the most important component, recognizing that effective language use depends on context beyond grammar or vocabulary. As one student noted: *"You master grammar and vocabulary when you know when and how to use them correctly."* Syntax ranked second (12 mentions), while Lexis trailed with 6.

When asked about the hardest aspect to learn, Syntax topped the list (21 responses), underscoring its role in causing stress, followed by Pragmatics (11), due to its abstract nature.

Students echoed Krashen's Input Hypothesis [1], emphasizing listening to natives, conversations, and natural use: *"Listening and speaking. That's how I learn."* Many viewed vocabulary as a foundation for confidence, aligning with Lewis's Lexical Approach [3] of learning language as prefabricated chunks. Overall, they favored a usage-based model, acquiring patterns through practice rather than rote memorization.

5.4. Similarities and Differences

Both groups converged on pragmatics as the most important component (over 55% in each) and syntax as the most difficult (over 50% selections). This shared perspective underscores a collective recognition of language as a tool for real-world communication, supporting usage-based models like CLT and Relevance Theory [10]. Qualitative responses reinforced this, with calls for contextual learning over isolated drills.

On the other hand, teachers downplayed lexis's importance (25% vs. students' 15%), possibly due to assuming incidental acquisition, while students emphasized it as an accessible entry point. Syntax was more central for students as a core component (30% vs. teachers' 17.5%), reflecting learners' immediate struggles with application. These gaps highlight opportunities for dialogue, such as scaffolding vocabulary to bolster pragmatic skills.

5.5. Theoretical Implications and Discussion

The findings reveal a dual perception: pragmatics is valued for its role in meaningful interaction, yet syntax remains a barrier, demanding cognitive effort. This contrasts with traditional approaches focused on grammatical accuracy, instead favoring Halliday's functional linguistics and Jenny Thomas's work on pragmatic performance [9]. The emphasis on vocabulary as a starting point echoes Paul Nation's balanced approach [8] and the Lexical Approach [3], where lexis enables fluid communication.

Pragmatics' perceived difficulty (11 responses per group) stems from its context-dependency, best addressed through Vygotsky's scaffolded interactions [5] and exposure to diverse settings. Overall, the results advocate for integrated pedagogy: embedding syntax in communicative tasks, as per Long's Focus on Form [15], to bridge structure and use.

Open-ended insights, such as a teacher's advice to "acquire

patterns of speech rather than individual words or sets of grammar rules,” and a student’s focus on “listening and speaking,” validate this shift toward experiential, interaction-rich education.

5.6. Suggested Strategies and Techniques

Participants proposed practical strategies, organized thematically for clarity:

Table 3. Participant-Suggested Strategies for English Language Acquisition, Including Theoretical Alignments and Examples.

Strategy Theme	Description	Theoretical Alignment	Participant Example
Vocabulary as Foundation	Prioritize learning basic vocabulary and frequently used expressions to build learner confidence and provide an accessible entry point into the language.	Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993), which emphasizes chunks, collocations, and phrase-based acquisition over isolated rules.	"Start with vocabulary you can use. Grammar can come later." (Teacher)
Listening and Speaking Focus	Engage with native speakers, watch authentic materials (e.g., videos, podcasts), and participate in conversations to facilitate subconscious acquisition and immediate oral practice.	Krashen’s Input Hypothesis [1], stressing comprehensible input; Tomasello’s usage-based model [2], where exposure to real-life language patterns aids natural learning.	"Listening to others helps me learn subconsciously." (Student); "Listening skill and speaking skill." (Student)
Contextual Integration	Embed grammar and vocabulary learning within real-world tasks, such as ordering food, telling stories, or group discussions, rather than through isolated drills.	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Long’s Focus on Form [15], integrating structure into meaningful communication.	"Language immersion would be beneficial in their subconscious mind, learning grammar through authentic content... ordering food from a restaurant using second language (L2)..." (Teacher); "You master grammar and vocabulary when you know when and how to use them correctly." (Student)
Repetition and Memory Aids	Utilize repetition techniques, flashcards, language apps, spaced learning, and theme-based vocabulary notebooks to reinforce retention and aid recall.	Paul Nation’s balanced approach [8], ensuring vocabulary and grammar are made “available” for fluid communication through repeated exposure.	"Using theme-based vocabulary notebooks." (Student, implied from responses)
Interactive and Performance-Based Tasks	Incorporate role-playing, project-based learning, collaborative dialogues, and simulations to develop language through social interaction and co-construction.	Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory [5], where language is learned through scaffolded interactions and mediated learning in various communicative settings.	"To acquire patterns of speech rather than individual words or sets of grammar rules." (Teacher); "Speaking and engaging in conversations as the best practice." (Participant consensus)

These strategies promote a balanced, usage-based model, addressing the identified challenges while leveraging valued components like pragmatics.

6. Future Recommendations and Curriculum Design Implications

The findings of this study, particularly the shared emphasis on pragmatics as the core of English, and the simultaneous struggle with syntax, offer both inspiration and responsibility. As someone immersed in English language education in Bahrain, I see this not as a conclusive endpoint, but as a starting point for further reflection, research, and pedagogical innovation.

6.1. Future Recommendations for Researchers

This study opens several important avenues for further inquiry, especially in contexts like Bahrain, where English is not only a school subject but a gatekeeper to academic success and professional mobility.

First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether emphasizing pragmatic competence and vocabulary development in the early stages of learning results in greater fluency and confidence over time. Do students who begin with usage-based strategies eventually outperform those who follow grammar-first methods? This is a question that can only be

answered through time-bound tracking and classroom intervention studies.

Second, future research could explore the relationship between learner identity and language strategy preference. Some learners in this study clearly leaned toward auditory input, others toward repetition or visual aids. These preferences may align with Gardner's Multiple Intelligences [7] or learning styles theory, and deserve further investigation. Understanding which strategies work best for specific learner types could support more individualized approaches to instruction.

Third, there is a strong case for investigating the training and beliefs of English teachers themselves. While teachers in this study valued pragmatics, many still struggle with how to teach it explicitly. Research could explore the extent to which Bahraini TEFL professionals are exposed to Lexical Approaches [3], Usage-Based Learning [2], and Focus on Form [15] methodologies in their own training. Do their pedagogical beliefs align with current linguistic theory? Are teacher preparation programs equipping them with the tools to move beyond rule-based instruction?

Finally, comparative cross-cultural studies may further illuminate how pragmatics is perceived and taught across different linguistic backgrounds. While this study is deeply contextualized in Bahrain, many of the insights, especially the tension between communicative competence and grammatical accuracy, are globally relevant.

6.2. Curriculum Design Implications

The implications for curriculum design in Bahraini higher education are both clear and compelling. The results from both students and teachers suggest an urgent need to rethink traditional, grammar-dominant curricula and move toward more communicative, pragmatic, and vocabulary-rich syllabi.

6.2.1. Repositioning Pragmatics as Central

Since both groups in this study viewed pragmatic competence as the most important aspect of language learning, curriculum planners should consider explicitly incorporating pragmatics into course outcomes. This means going beyond grammar exercises and translation tasks to include real-life role-plays, discourse analysis, sociolinguistic awareness, and performance-based assessments. Drawing on Grice's Cooperative Principle [4] and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory [5], instruction should frame language as a tool for negotiation, adaptation, and social meaning, not just correctness.

6.2.2. Rethinking Grammar Instruction

Grammar (syntax) remains a pain point. Rather than isolating it, curricula should adopt a Focus on Form approach [15], where grammatical structures are taught within meaningful contexts. This may involve using authentic texts, student writing samples, or simulations in which grammar emerges organically and is refined through targeted feedback.

In line with Krashen's Input Hypothesis [1], grammar

should be introduced after sufficient exposure to comprehensible input, not before. This approach can lower anxiety and help students notice patterns naturally rather than memorizing disconnected rules.

6.2.3. Prioritizing Lexical and Chunk-based Learning

Given that many students highlighted vocabulary acquisition, especially in the form of high-frequency expressions and thematic word lists, there is a need to embed lexical learning into every stage of the curriculum. This is not about memorization but about teaching chunks, collocations, and formulaic sequences that facilitate spontaneous language use, as emphasized in Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach [3].

Instructors can encourage learners to keep lexical notebooks, use digital flashcard apps, or participate in collaborative vocabulary-building tasks. These strategies reinforce retention and support communicative fluency.

6.2.4. Making Space for Student Voice and Learning Styles

One of the most meaningful insights from this study was the variety of student-recommended techniques, listening to music, watching shows, making vocabulary lists, and using English socially. Curricula should build flexibility into course plans to accommodate these preferences. Not all learners thrive under the same conditions, and respecting learner autonomy may significantly boost motivation and achievement.

Encouraging metacognitive awareness, that is helping students understand how they learn best, can be as important as teaching the content itself. This is supported by Usage-Based Learning Theory [2], which emphasizes pattern recognition through repeated exposure and personalized use.

6.2.5. Integrating Teacher Development

Lastly, any curricular innovation must be accompanied by teacher training. Instructors need concrete tools and real models for teaching pragmatics, integrating grammar meaningfully, and using vocabulary in context. Professional development workshops could focus on new methods such as task-based learning, discourse awareness, and form-function mapping, making theoretical insights more accessible to classroom practice.

7. Conclusion and Insights for Future Research

In conclusion, the path forward is both hopeful and practical. This study has shown that learners and teachers are already aligned in key ways. They value communication, real-world use, and meaningful input. By designing curricula that reflect these priorities, supported by the best of what research and theory offer, we can make English language teaching in Bahrain more

responsive, effective, and empowering for both educators and students alike.

This study revealed that both students and teachers of English perceive Pragmatics as the core component of the language, yet acknowledge Syntax as the most difficult aspect to master. Such findings offer compelling evidence to reorient English language pedagogy toward more communicative, socially grounded models of instruction. The alignment between learner perception and progressive language theories (such as the Lexical Approach [3], Usage-Based Learning [2], and Focus on Form [15]) invites educators to rethink the dominance of rule-based grammar in curricula.

Future research should explore the practical classroom applications of these findings, particularly how to effectively integrate pragmatic instruction with syntactic development. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate whether emphasizing pragmatics and vocabulary early in the learning journey results in improved fluency and competence over time.

More culturally situated studies may further clarify how pragmatic awareness varies across linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, research might assess teacher training programs to ensure they align with current theoretical insights and classroom realities.

Ultimately, the future of English language teaching lies in striking a dynamic balance between accuracy and appropriacy, form and function, structure and use. The voice of both teachers and learners in this study provides a strong foundation for pedagogical renewal and theoretical refinement.

Abbreviations

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
L2	Second Language
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Author Contributions

Nawal Shekar is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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