THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH IN LANGUAGE USE: WITTGENSTEIN'S THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the concept of truth in language use according to Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical thought and its implications for English language teaching in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. The research employs a qualitative approach using library research methods through the analysis of Wittgenstein's works and recent academic literature in the fields of philosophy of language and pedagogy. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including relevant books and peer-reviewed journal articles, and analyzed using content analysis techniques. The findings indicate that Wittgenstein's concept of "truth as use" directly influences a more communicative and contextual approach to English language teaching. The main finding reveals that a language-games-based approach enhances students' communicative performance by balancing grammatical accuracy and social acceptability. Moreover, the results emphasize that learning evaluation should not only focus on propositional truth but also on functional truth, reflecting learners' ability to use language appropriately in social contexts. Consequently, this research contributes theoretically by bridging Wittgenstein's philosophy of language with modern pedagogical practices and offers a conceptual foundation for developing more pragmatic curricula and evaluation strategies in English language teaching.

Keywords: *Ludwig Wittgenstein, language truth, language games, English language teaching, pragmatic approach*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep kebenaran dalam penggunaan bahasa menurut pemikiran Ludwig Wittgenstein serta implikasinya terhadap pengajaran bahasa Inggris di kelas EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka (library research) melalui analisis terhadap karya-karya Wittgenstein dan literatur akademik terkini dalam bidang filsafat bahasa dan pedagogi. Data diperoleh dari sumber sekunder berupa buku dan jurnal ilmiah yang relevan, kemudian dianalisis dengan teknik analisis isi (content analysis). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsep "kebenaran sebagai penggunaan" (*truth as use*) yang dikemukakan Wittgenstein berimplikasi langsung terhadap pengajaran bahasa Inggris yang lebih komunikatif dan kontekstual. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan berbasis *language games* dapat meningkatkan performa komunikatif siswa dengan

menyeimbangkan antara akurasi gramatikal dan keberterimaan sosial. Selain itu, hasil kajian menegaskan bahwa evaluasi pembelajaran seharusnya tidak hanya berfokus pada kebenaran proposisional, tetapi juga pada kebenaran fungsional yang mencerminkan kemampuan siswa menggunakan bahasa secara tepat dalam konteks sosial. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dalam menjembatani konsep filsafat bahasa Wittgenstein dengan praktik pedagogis modern, serta menawarkan landasan konseptual bagi pengembangan kurikulum dan strategi evaluasi yang lebih pragmatis dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci*: Ludwig Wittgenstein, kebenaran bahasa, language games, pengajaran bahasa Inggris, pendekatan pragmatik.*

A. Introduction

In current English language learning practices, a significant shift has occurred from an emphasis on grammatical form toward a focus on language function and use in real contexts. In many classrooms, students' abilities are still assessed using right–wrong based tests emphasizing grammatical accuracy, even though daily communication requires fluency, social acceptability, and functional appropriateness of utterances (Zhang, 2021). Teachers often face a dilemma: should a grammatically "incorrect" yet communicatively effective utterance be considered right, or should assessment remain bound to propositional truth alone (Bagheri & Fazilatfar, 2020)? This phenomenon is practically crucial because it concerns learners' success in using English functionally in real-life situations and

academically significant as it opens a deeper debate about the nature of linguistic truth. Wittgenstein, through his view that *meaning is use*, offers the perspective that truth is not merely a correspondence between propositions and facts but a conformity between utterances and the rules of social practice (*language-games*). Therefore, examining the concept of truth in English teaching becomes essential to bridge philosophical theory and contemporary pedagogical needs (Bagheri & Fazilatfar, 2020; Zhang, 2021).

Previous studies have attempted to relate Wittgenstein's ideas to language teaching. For example, Ali and Hussain (2019) emphasized the importance of *language-games* as an approach to improve students' communicative competence in TESOL contexts, while Tran (2020) implemented language-based

activities to enhance speaking skills in EFL classrooms. These studies demonstrate ongoing efforts to bridge philosophical theory and teaching practice. However, most of these studies remain limited to conceptual discussions or small-scale applications, which weakens their generalizability to curriculum or formal assessment levels (Tran, 2020). Furthermore, earlier research often focused on oral skills without explicitly linking Wittgenstein's truth concept to evaluation instruments or learning outcomes. This implies that despite some initial contributions, there is still a gap in operationalizing Wittgenstein's concept of truth as a practical foundation for designing both teaching strategies and evaluation instruments (Ali & Hussain, 2019; Tran, 2020).

The main limitation of prior studies lies in the lack of operationalization of Wittgenstein's notion of truth into measurable and observable variables in language learning. For instance, indicators of *functional truth* such as social acceptability or pragmatic appropriateness are rarely used as formal assessment rubrics (Ahmed, 2021). Moreover, most studies remain descriptive and philosophical without establishing an empirical model that tests causal relationships between teaching approaches and learners' outcomes (Nasr & Alavi, 2022). Therefore, this paper aims to: (1) reconceptualize linguistic truth from a Wittgensteinian perspective for English language teaching application; (2) explore the implications of the truth concept for teaching methods and strategies, particularly in balancing formal accuracy and communicative acceptability; and (3) formulate an assessment framework that measures aspects of *functional truth* in language learning.

Based on philosophical and pedagogical analysis, this study proposes that English language teaching grounded in Wittgenstein's concept of truth particularly through *language-games* can enhance students' communicative performance more effectively than approaches focused solely on grammatical accuracy (Brown & Lee, 2020). The independent variable in this context is the teaching approach (traditional grammar-based vs. contextual language-use based), while the dependent variable is students'

communicative performance, including social acceptability, pragmatic accuracy, and fluency (Kumar, 2021). The conceptual cause–effect relationship is: *Use-based teaching model → increased functional truth & communicative performance → shift of evaluation focus from formal accuracy to functional use*. If supported by the literature review, this implies the need to design curricula, teaching strategies, and assessment tools that emphasize functional truth in line with Wittgenstein's views. Thus, this study bridges the gap between philosophical theories of truth and English language teaching practices (Brown & Lee, 2020; Kumar, 2021).

B. Research Method

The unit of analysis in this research consists of texts and scientific literature that discuss the concept of truth in language use and its implications for English language teaching. The study does not focus directly on individuals or groups, but rather on academic artifacts such as written works, articles, journals, and books that represent Wittgenstein's ideas and their development within the field of language education. These artifacts serve as the main sources for understanding how the philosophical concept of truth in language can be interpreted and integrated into ELT (English Language Teaching) practices. Thus, this research places theoretical concepts and scholarly literature as the core of analysis. The choice of this unit of analysis aligns with the qualitative research orientation, which emphasizes meaning and interpretation rather than numerical measurement. Therefore, the study focuses on exploring meanings, patterns of thought, and arguments contained in the literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of Wittgenstein's concept of truth in language and its pedagogical implications.

The research design employed is qualitative, using a library research approach. In this orientation, the researcher does not collect field data through experiments or surveys but instead conducts an in-depth exploration of relevant texts, documents, and literature. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to examine linguistic phenomena with an emphasis on meaning construction rather than data quantification. This design is particularly suitable since the topic

under investigation is philosophical and conceptual, requiring the analysis of Wittgenstein's works and contemporary interpretations of truth in language. The qualitative orientation also supports the use of textual hermeneutics as the main framework — interpreting texts based on their historical, philosophical, and pedagogical contexts. Through this design, the study produces descriptive, interpretative, and theoretical syntheses that are relevant to English language teaching.

The data sources of this research are entirely secondary, comprising various documents, literature, and scientific articles relevant to the research topic. The main sources include Wittgenstein's works, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*, as well as recent academic publications discussing the application of Wittgenstein's concepts in language education (e.g., Bagheri & Fazilatfar, 2020; Ahmed, 2021; Nasr & Alavi, 2022). In addition, articles from international journals such as *TESOL Quarterly*, *Journal of Language and Education*, and *Asian EFL Journal* are utilized, covering discussions on truth, meaning, and ELT practices from philosophical, pedagogical, and

evaluative perspectives. Hence, the research relies on written texts as its primary data sources, which are critically examined to identify conceptual patterns, arguments, and their relevance to English language teaching.

The data collection technique employed is library research with a systematic procedure. First, the researcher identifies relevant literature by searching academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate, JSTOR) using keywords such as "Wittgenstein," "truth in language," "language games," and "English Language Teaching." Second, the literature is selected based on specific criteria: relevance to the topic, publication year (not earlier than 2020), and availability as peer-reviewed articles or academic books. Third, an in-depth reading process is conducted to extract key information such as concepts, arguments, methodologies, and findings related to the research theme. Fourth, the extracted information is categorized and organized according to the research focus. Through this procedure, data collection is carried out systematically and purposefully to

produce valid and credible material for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted through several stages. First, data reduction was applied to select the most relevant literature while excluding the less pertinent sources. Second, the collected data were analyzed using content analysis, focusing on main themes such as the concept of truth, language use, and pedagogical implications. Third, the data were categorized according to research orientation — philosophical, pedagogical, or evaluative. Fourth, synthesis and interpretation were conducted by connecting analytical results with Wittgenstein's conceptual framework and the ELT context. Finally, the results were presented in descriptive narratives containing findings, discussions, and interpretations. This process ensures that data are not merely described but also critically interpreted to produce new insights.

To ensure data validity, the study employs source triangulation and critical literature review. Triangulation is carried out by comparing various academic sources from different authors and journals to verify information consistency. The critical literature review means the researcher not only cites but also evaluates the quality of arguments, methodologies, and relevance of previous findings to the current research. Furthermore, reference documentation follows the APA citation standard systematically. These measures ensure high conceptual validity since the analysis is grounded in credible, up-to-date, and relevant literature. Ultimately, the validity of the findings is not derived from statistical tests but from the strength of argumentation and consistency of interpretation within the qualitative framework.

C.Result and Discussion
Result

The analysis of primary literature sources, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) and secondary studies by Bagheri and Fazilatfar (2020), reveals that truth in language cannot be separated from its context of use. Wittgenstein emphasizes that the meaning of a word or utterance is determined by its use in social practice, rather than by grammatical structure alone. In this sense, language functions like a "game" (language games) governed by social conventions among speakers. Each

communicative context has its own rules, meaning that a statement can only be considered true if it aligns with the rules of a specific language game. From this perspective, truth is functional and contextual rather than purely propositional. This implies that linguistic truth depends on the appropriateness between an utterance and its communicative purpose. Such a view provides a philosophical foundation for language teaching—particularly English language learning—that emphasizes not only grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic meaning and contextual appropriateness in communication.

Furthermore, the analysis of literature by Tran (2020), Ahmed (2021), and Brown and Lee (2020) indicates that applying the concept of language games in language instruction positively impacts students' communicative competence. Through activities such as role-plays, simulations, and pragmatic dialogues, students are trained to use language functionally and contextually. Research findings demonstrate that learners engaged in context-based activities show greater improvement in fluency and social acceptability compared to those taught using traditional grammar-based methods. Contextualized learning activities also enhance student participation and motivation, as learners perceive that the language they are learning is relevant to real-life situations. In this approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator guiding social interaction rather than as the sole authority determining linguistic correctness. Thus, language games serve not only as a teaching method but also as a practical application of Wittgenstein's idea of language as a living social activity.

The subsequent findings focus on the implications of Wittgenstein's concept of truth for language assessment systems. According to studies by Nasr and Alavi (2022), Zhang (2021), and Kumar (2021), English language evaluation remains largely dominated by the propositional paradigm that judges correctness based on grammatical accuracy. However, there is a growing shift toward communicative assessment, which evaluates social acceptability, functional accuracy, and the effectiveness of meaning in real communication. In this emerging paradigm, the success of learners is

measured not only by structural correctness but also by their ability to adjust utterances appropriately to social and cultural contexts. This type of assessment better reflects students' communicative competence, especially in terms of pragmatic skills. The findings indicate a transformation from assessing "truth in form" to assessing "truth in use." Teachers are thus encouraged to develop assessment instruments that evaluate students' ability to use language effectively and contextually, rather than merely penalizing grammatical errors.

Overall, the three strands of findings above reinforce the view that Wittgenstein's concept of truth holds significant relevance in modern English language education. Truth in language is understood as the alignment between utterance and context, not merely adherence to grammatical rules. The implementation of language games promotes communicative, participatory, and meaningful learning, while the paradigm shift toward functional assessment creates fairer and more human-centered ways to evaluate language proficiency. Hence, Wittgenstein's philosophy provides not only a new theoretical foundation for linguistic understanding but also practical implications for English teachers in designing learning and assessment strategies that prioritize communicative function and social relevance in language use.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that applying Wittgenstein's concept of truth in English language teaching significantly enhances students' communicative performance. The main results indicate that language functions not merely as a formal system but as a social practice governed by contextual rules of use (Wittgenstein, 2009). The language-games approach has proven effective in helping students understand the relationship between meaning and context, as meaning in language games depends on how and when an utterance is used (Birgani & Soqandi, 2020). Furthermore, the results affirm that language assessment should not only evaluate grammatical accuracy but also students' ability to use language functionally and socially (Rosy Master, Husna, Kulstum, & Farkhan, 2022). Thus, this study reinforces the view that linguistic truth

is contextual and functional rather than purely propositional.

This interpretation aligns with Wittgenstein's theory of *meaning as use* and its application in communicative language teaching. According to Birgani and Soqandi (2020), understanding language as a social activity requires teachers to place communicative context at the center of instruction. In the EFL context, Yaccob and Yunus (2019) argue that language games help learners grasp the unwritten conversational norms that reflect social and pragmatic meanings. Hence, the results of this study can be explained by the paradigm shift from structure-based learning to function- and meaning-based learning. When students engage in language games, they naturally learn to connect linguistic forms with communicative functions (Hakami & Abdelrahman, 2019). Therefore, the success of Wittgenstein's framework in English language teaching lies in its ability to foster engagement, contextual awareness, and meaning simultaneously.

Compared with previous studies, this research shows both continuity and novelty. For instance, Ali, Ahmad, and Khan (2019) found that traditional ELT assessment systems still prioritize grammatical accuracy over communicative ability. However, the present study highlights a shift toward meaning- and function-based assessment, consistent with Brown and Lee's (2020) notion of *functional correctness*. Meanwhile, Hakami and Abdelrahman (2019) reported that using games in grammar teaching increased student motivation, though they did not fully connect these activities to functional truth. Therefore, this study contributes novelty by integrating Wittgenstein's philosophical dimension into pedagogical and evaluative frameworks. It reveals that truth in language is not a purely logical phenomenon but rather a reflection of how language aligns with specific social contexts.

More deeply, the study interprets linguistic truth as a socially and ideologically grounded concept. As Wittgenstein (2009) asserted, language is an integral part of human social life, and every utterance derives its meaning through shared social practices. In English language teaching, this implies that "true" communication is that which is socially

acceptable in real-life interaction, rather than what merely conforms to grammatical rules. Paluanova (2023) supports this claim, arguing that pragmatic competence assessment better represents students' communicative ability than structure-based evaluation. Thus, truth in language teaching cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which language is used. This means that English instruction should aim to foster awareness of social norms, communicative goals, and pragmatic values embedded in linguistic expression.

Reflection on these findings reveals critical implications for teachers and curriculum designers. Işık and Sarı (2021) highlight that many English teachers lack sufficient assessment literacy in evaluating communicative aspects of student performance. Meanwhile, Rosy Master et al. (2022) found that communicative competence–based assessment provides higher validity within the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) framework. Therefore, this study suggests the need for teacher training on functional truth assessment to ensure holistic evaluation of grammatical, pragmatic,

and social dimensions of language use. Moreover, it calls for a shift in the perception of language—from a mere tool for information transfer to a medium for social participation.

The practical implications of this study extend to three main areas: curriculum policy, teaching strategies, and assessment systems. First, curricula should emphasize context-based learning through activities such as language games and communicative simulations (Lumintang & Kuswandono, 2025). Second, teachers need to integrate evaluation instruments that measure *functional truth*, including social acceptability and pragmatic appropriateness (Rosy Master et al., 2022). Third, educational institutions should foster reflective and contextually grounded learning environments so that students can engage with meaning more deeply. Therefore, implementing Wittgenstein's notion of truth provides a philosophical foundation for reforming English language education toward a more communicative, contextual, and human-centered approach. Ultimately, this research contributes to the development of a pragmatic-philosophical paradigm in

language education—one that evaluates not only *what* students say, but also *how* and *why* they say it (Birgani & Soqandi, 2020; Lumintang & Kuswandono, 2025).

D. Conclusion

This study reveals that Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, particularly the concept of *language games*, provides a new perspective in understanding the notion of linguistic truth in the modern technological era. Truth is no longer viewed as an absolute entity but rather as something dependent on the social, cultural, and digital contexts in which language is used. In language learning practices, this can be observed through how students construct meaning from words and sentences based on their interactive experiences in virtual spaces such as social media and digital learning platforms (Birgani & Soqandi, 2020). Thus, this research affirms that Wittgenstein's pragmatic approach remains relevant for analyzing linguistic dynamics in the digital era, where meaning is deeply contextual (Lumintang & Kuswandono, 2025).

The main strength of this study lies in its contribution to bridging classical philosophy of language with modern contexts of communication and education. It not only offers a renewed interpretation of the *language games* concept but also connects it with technology-based English language education practices. This approach broadens our understanding of how digital interaction shapes the construction of linguistic meaning and truth (Paluanova, 2023). Furthermore, the study provides a theoretical contribution to the development of meaning-based learning models and opens new pathways for exploring the integration between philosophy of language and digital-based pedagogy (Rosy Master et al., 2022).

Despite its significant contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it remains largely conceptual and lacks extensive empirical implementation in classroom or digital experimental contexts. Second, the interpretation of Wittgenstein's ideas focuses mainly on the pragmatic dimension without further exploration of their ontological and epistemological aspects in postmodern discourse. Therefore, future research is recommended to develop empirical studies that test the application of *language games* in

technology-mediated language learning and to further investigate the interplay among meaning, identity, and technology (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019; Hakami & Abdelrahman, 2019).

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