



Investigating Pre-service English Teachers' Beliefs of Sociolinguistic Instruction in EFL Classes in Taiwan

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Abstract: The study investigates Taiwanese English teachers' beliefs of teaching sociolinguistic skills. Ten EFL pre-service English teachers in teacher education programs were purposively selected via homogeneous sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The results revealed that although most pre-service teachers consider sociolinguistic instruction important, they feel that they did not have adequate sociolinguistic competence, and that they lack confidence in teaching sociolinguistic skills. These pre-service teachers' self-reported inadequate sociolinguistic competence and low confidence in teaching sociolinguistic skills could be attributed to such sociocultural factors as time constraints, exam-driven teaching culture, and insufficient exposure to the target language culture, as well as materials deprived of authentic pragmatic content. The study concludes with major findings, pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: pre-service English teachers; teacher beliefs; sociolinguistic skills; communicative language teaching (CLT); English as a foreign language (EFL)

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and multiculturalism, English has become a common international language (i.e. lingua franca) in various settings, including international education, business, international diplomacy and politics, and cross-cultural online virtual exchanges (Razak et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, learning English has become a necessity in order to attain the goal of effective global communication. To this end, English language teachers aspire to cultivate students' communicative competence via student-centered communicative approaches, such as communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT), content-based instruction (CBI), and recently content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Richards & Rogers, 2015). These student-centered, constructivist approaches engage students in active learning, increase their learning motivation, and facilitate the acquisition of the target language and culture (Gao, 2014; Benattabou, 2020). Therefore, language educators, researchers, and teaching practitioners around the world have gradually adopted these communication-oriented approaches in the burgeoning field of second language acquisition (SLA). Despite the strong emphasis on fostering students' communicative competence, efforts seem to focus more on developing students' lexical and grammatical knowledge (see Sun & Zhang, 2021), with a relatively less focus on the development of students' sociolinguistic skills. (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018; Yu, 2008). Sociolinguistic competence, which is about the appropriate use of language according to particular socio-cultural and discourse rules, refers to the acquisition of sociopragmatic knowledge and pragmalinguistic competence, requiring an understanding of how language is used in a given social context (Taguchi, 2011).

Sociolinguistics, which includes knowledge of forms and functions, and situational constraints that determine form-function mapping, extends beyond grammar. As a result, language learning entails not only the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary but also the appropriate use of language in a particular cultural context. Without explicit focus on sociolinguistic instruction, the negative transfer from L1 sociolinguistic knowledge might result in cross-cultural misunderstandings or communication breakdown (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Hsieh, 2011; Yu, 2008). To remove intercultural communication barriers, Taguchi and Ishihara (2018), for example, have suggested that explicit and awareness-raising sociolinguistic learning tasks be incorporated into curriculum design and ESL/EFL textbook contents. In addition, TESOL education programs should prepare teachers to assist language learners in understanding cross-cultural communication.

Recent research (Sun & Zhang, 2019) has also indicated that teacher beliefs (i.e. teacher cognition in mainstream teacher education research) play an increasingly important role in second language acquisition (SLA). To understand language teachers' instructional practices, it is important to understand teacher beliefs. Such line of research can be seen in the proliferation of research output on teacher beliefs about form-focus instruction and four-skill practice (Borg, 2015; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015; Sun & Zhang, 2019; Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). However, little empirical research has been conducted to explore teacher beliefs of teaching and learning sociolinguistic skills in EFL classrooms.

Accordingly, it is of value to investigate this under-explored dimension of L2 teaching by understanding the cognitions of teachers. Most of teacher beliefs studies were investigated from a cognitive perspective (Barcelos, 2003; Borg, 2019; Peacock, 2001), and teacher beliefs are considered fixed, stable mental representation of experience that is difficult to change; however, such an approach makes it difficult to contextualize how teacher beliefs are shaped (Sun & Zhang, 2019). Scholars (Burns et al., 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Li, 2020) have maintained that teacher beliefs are socially situated and dynamically constructed by the social environment. Qualitative study may serve as an appropriate method to provide details and contextualize the phenomenon under investigation. Drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the current study extends the scope of sociolinguistics research into language teacher beliefs of sociolinguistic instruction in Taiwan's EFL classes by shifting its theoretical lens from a cognitive to a sociocultural perspective.

In Taiwan, English is the most commonly learned foreign language. Since September 2011, it has been a required course for students from Grade 1 to Grade 12. However, students' motivations for learning English has remained instrumental, either to fulfill the course requirements or to pass the entrance examinations to the next level of schooling (Chern, 2006). The instructional focus usually did not deviate from the government-stipulated curriculum guidelines. Hence, English has been taught with a heavy focus on teach-to-test practice. The chief goal of English teaching was to aid students in passing the high-stakes entrance examinations to top-tier senior high schools and universities (Su, 2000). In such an exam-driven culture, exploring Taiwan pre-service teachers' beliefs of teaching sociolinguistic skills can lead to a better understanding of how sociolinguistic skills are taught for effective cross-cultural communication.

In recent years, scholars (Hsieh, 2011; Khany & Mohammadi, 2020; Sun & Zhang, 2021; Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018; Yu, 2008) have conducted classroom-based, empirical research to explore English teachers' sociolinguistic instruction in communication-oriented EFL classes, whereas very few studies have been conducted to investigate pre-service English teachers' beliefs of teaching sociolinguistic skills vis-à-vis their sociocultural environments. To fill this research void, the purpose of the study is to explore pre-service English teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic skills by analyzing what role pre-service English teachers believe sociolinguistic competence should play and identifying

potential difficulties that pre-service English teachers face. The current study contributes to the extant body of sociolinguistic research by researching pre-service English teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic skills in EFL classes in Taiwan. To this end, the current study aims to investigate the following:

1. What role do pre-service English teachers think that sociolinguistic instruction should play in Taiwan's EFL classes?
2. What difficulties are perceived by Taiwan's pre-service English teachers who advocated communication-based approach in teaching sociolinguistic skills?

2. Literature Review

This section systematically reviews the literature on the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, approaches to teacher beliefs in SLA research, sociolinguistic teaching and learning, and teacher beliefs of sociolinguistic instruction in EFL contexts.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The current research is framed by Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (hereafter SCT) because it is believed that teacher beliefs are shaped by social-cultural environments and by their interaction with people. According to SCT, human thinking is developed through social interaction (Lantolf, 2006). Moreover, the semiotic artifacts, such as interpersonal relationships and the culturally transmitted materials in a sociocultural milieu, mediate relationships that shape human thinking (Johnson, 2009; Li, 2020). Therefore, development of beliefs, mediated by the sociocultural and historical contexts, is a process of social interaction. Situated in a social environment, teacher beliefs are mediated by the symbolic system that is ultimately converted into the medium of thought. The purpose of a sociocultural approach aims to depict human mental processes, capturing the relationship of these processes vis-à-vis their social contexts (Sun & Zhang, 2021).

The rationale of using SCT in this study is that pre-service teachers' beliefs of sociolinguistic instruction are investigated not only from teachers' mental processes but also in social contexts. Simply put, pre-service teachers' beliefs of sociolinguistic instruction may be influenced by the mediation of cultural, institutional, and historical contexts. SCT has been adopted to understand either teacher beliefs or learner beliefs about language teaching and learning in other contexts. For example, Mohamed (2014) investigated teacher beliefs in relation to gender, location, and subject matter in the United Arab Emirates. In our study, SCT is adopted to explicate Taiwanese EFL pre-service English teachers' beliefs of integrating sociolinguistic instruction in relation to its sociocultural, historical, and institutional contexts.

2.2 Approaches to teacher beliefs in SLA research

In the literature of teacher beliefs, three major approaches were distinguished by SLA scholars, which are: the normative, the meta-cognitive, and the contextual approaches (Barcelos, 2003; Ellis, 2008). In the normative approach, beliefs in most studies are considered preconceived notions, myths or misconceptions (see Peacock, 2001). However, this approach makes it difficult to measure such beliefs in the students' or teachers' own words through Likert-style questionnaires. To complement this, the meta-cognitive approach gives participants a chance to reflect on their learning and teaching experiences via interviews.

In the meta-cognitive approach, scholars like Wenden (1999) portray this knowledge as subject to change across time and describe beliefs as part of meta-cognitive knowledge. Although this approach

gives learners opportunities to reflect and elaborate on their experiences, it does not consider socio-cultural and contextual influences on learners' learning outcomes (Barcelos, 2003; Ellis, 2008; Sun & Zhang, 2021).

In the contextual approach, beliefs are perceived as situated, dynamic and social, which usually entails multifarious data collection methods and analysis (Ellis, 2008). Context, understood as learners constructing their experiences, is crucial to analyzing this type of belief (Barcelos, 2003).

Taken together, this study uses the contextual approach to investigate pre-service English teachers' beliefs of integrating sociolinguistic instruction in Taiwan's EFL classes, viewed from the aforementioned sociocultural theory (SCT).

2.3 Sociolinguistic teaching and learning

In Taguchi and Ishihara's (2018) systematic review study, they have reported on the existing literature and discussed diverse issues related to sociolinguistic teaching and learning in the following two categories: (a) intervention studies that directly measure the effect of particular teaching methods on sociolinguistic development and (b) studies that deal with effective teaching materials and resources for sociolinguistic development in classroom settings.

Despite the complexity of teaching sociolinguistic skills, L2 learners' sociolinguistic competence can be enhanced through proper pedagogy and instructional materials (Takahashi, 2010). The strongest support for sociolinguistic intervention studies in the SLA theory is Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis. According to Schmidt (2001), learners must notice L2 features in input for subsequent sociolinguistic development to occur in their acquisition of these features. Hence, form-function mapping and relevant contextual features for enhanced input are essential.

For instance, Alcón-Soler (2007) compared the effect of explicit and implicit treatment on Spanish EFL learners' acquisition of request forms. The explicit group received information regarding requests, and they were asked to identify instances of requests and to justify their decisions, while the implicit group was offered awareness-raising tasks that featured input enhancement via bold type or capitalization without any explanation. In the posttest, both groups outperformed the control group, but without significant differences between the two experimental groups. The explicit group, however, maintained learning up to the delayed posttest 3 weeks after the treatment. As Takahashi (2010) explained, the positive effect of explicit instruction can be attributed to learners' greater cognitive involvement in the explicit condition. Her findings are in line with Jeon and Kaya's (2006) meta-analysis, which generalizes that the effect of explicit instruction was statistically significant in general, reiterating the essential role of metapragmatic explanation for facilitating sociolinguistic development.

2.4 Teacher beliefs of sociolinguistic instruction in EFL contexts

The importance of sociolinguistic skills can be traced back to the adoption the communicative approach developed in Anglophone contexts. There may be some constraints that limit the teaching and learning of sociolinguistic skills in EFL contexts.

Prior research points out that socio-cultural instruction often involves dealing with students' cultural attitudes, so teachers are likely to find it paradoxical to help students understand and use the sociopragmatic conventions in the target language. (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018). For example, Ishihara and Tarone (2009) found that Japanese learners from Anglophone countries were likely to resist the

use of honorifics or gendered language because they believed in egalitarian social relationships. Their belief system was shaped by sociocultural milieu in their home country.

Also, Hu (2002) examines one of the most important potential constraints on the adoption of CLT in the Chinese classroom, revealing that such a communicative approach is incompatible with the Chinese culture of learning due to different expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, preferences, experiences, and behaviors characterized by Chinese society regarding teaching and learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Therefore, teachers with varied teaching philosophies about the nature of teaching and learning may interpret the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students differently, thus perceiving pedagogical innovations developed in a different sociocultural milieu as either facilitating or inhibiting factors in classroom instruction.

As for Taiwan's EFL classes, Hsieh (2011) observed that Taiwanese EFL teachers did not put equal emphasis on sociolinguistic teaching due to time constraints in a communication-oriented language class. He conducted classroom observations and interviewed one university teacher and students in an EFL classroom using case study, indicating that the university teacher did not practice what she preached, ignoring this important instruction. However, students showed their positive attitude toward learning sociolinguistic skills. Incongruences exist between the university teacher and students.

In short, research has received robust support for the effect of sociolinguistic instruction on L2 learning. However, less attention was devoted to pre-service English teachers' beliefs of the development of sociolinguistic competence in language teaching research from SCT. In particular, how were pre-service English teachers' beliefs shaped and reflected in classroom practices in Taiwan? Evidence of beliefs of teaching sociolinguistic skills needs to be further accumulated to contribute to a better understanding of the implementation of sociolinguistic instruction. Given that Taiwan is a multicultural society where English is learned as a foreign language, this study can contribute to a fuller understanding of how pre-service English teachers in Taiwan can aid EFL students in effective intercultural communication through English.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research paradigm to investigate pre-service teachers' beliefs about sociolinguistic instruction. A pilot study was conducted to eliminate and to refine the interview questions, and semi-structured interviews were undertaken to analyze teacher beliefs of teaching sociolinguistic skills in EFL classes in Taiwan.

3.2 Participants

Ten pre-service English teachers (two males and eight females) from three selected TESOL-programs in northern Taiwan participated in the study, as Table 1 presents the demographic information of the ten participants. These participants were purposively selected based on homogeneous sampling given that the participants shared homogeneous TESOL-related educational backgrounds with the researchers.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Case	Gender	Teaching Experience (year)	MA-TESOL experience (year)	Language Proficiency (CEFR)
P1	F	6	3	B2
P2	F	7	1	B2
P3	F	7	0.5	B2
P4	F	3.5	0.5	B2
P5	F	6	2	B2
P6	F	4	0.5	B2
P7	F	3	0.5	B2
P8	M	0.5	2	B2
P9	F	2.5	3	B2
P10	M	3.5	0.5	C1

Note: MA = Master of Arts, M = male, F= female, B2 = high-intermediate, C1= advanced, CEFR = the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

These participants had some teaching experience, such as tutoring, teaching in private language institutes, or teaching practicum, ranging from 0.5 to 7 years. Only three participants had prior experience of teaching in public schools. These participants expressed concern about language education in Taiwan and demonstrated significant enthusiasm for teaching English.

As for the MA-TESOL learning experience, the courses they took included *Introduction to TESOL*, *TESOL Methodologies*, *SLA Theories*, *Corpus Linguistics*, *Curriculum and Language Teaching*, *Research Methods and Writing*, and *TESOL Practicum*. It is worth noting that none of them had taken such courses as *Sociolinguistics and English Teaching* before. Their learning experience in MA-TESOL programs ranged from 0.5 to 3 years, with an average of 1.35 years in training. Nine people considered their language proficiency to be B2-level (90%), and only one C1-level (10%), according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

3.3 Data collection and analysis

An exploratory-interpretive research paradigm was used to explain the EFL teachers' beliefs of teaching sociolinguistic skills. The researchers developed a rough scheme for the 1st coding, which was modified based on the interview data. The second/final scheme was developed to classify all the participants' responses, which were later transcribed, translated and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) method, such as noting patterns and themes, and grouping items into categories, all of which are methods of reducing large amounts of qualitative data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The pilot study, interview protocol, the interview data analysis, and the results of the study were validated through peer review and member checking.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the researchers provide the results of the two research questions from the interview data, followed by discussion compared with previous literature.

4.1 What role do pre-service English teachers think that sociolinguistic instruction should play in Taiwan's EFL classes?

To answer the first research question, all of the interviewees considered sociolinguistic instruction important, which may influence sociolinguistic instruction. For example, the ten interviewees (namely P1-P10) all agreed that teaching students culture-related skills (sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic skills) are important in L2 teaching. P7 commented:

"I think that teaching students sociolinguistic skills is very important because the international and global community is here to stay. English language learners in Taiwan should have [a] long-term goal, not just focus on the short-term only like passing exams and getting a decent job. If they want to communicate with international residents more effectively and appropriately, it is suggested that classroom time should be allocated to develop students' sociolinguistic skills."

This suggests that not only should learners understand the correct form of the target language, but they should also understand how to use English appropriately to ensure effective communication with people with multi-cultural backgrounds to reduce cross-cultural misunderstandings. Echoing the research findings by previous studies (Alcón-Soler, 2007, 2015; Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018; Takahashi, 2010; Yu, 2008), more classroom time should be spent on the development of learners' sociolinguistic skills because the effect of explicit sociolinguistic instruction on EFL learners is significant. Another participant (P9) articulated:

"Teaching pragmatic skills is of course important because the way of communicating with people with diverse cultural backgrounds differs substantially. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. And sometimes your students might come from different socio-cultural backgrounds, so you need to pay close attention to this aspect. For example, I once taught students the different expressions between Chinese and English to raise their awareness of cultural differences. Normally, students enjoy learning things they don't know, and they are willing to ask me more questions related to the cultural aspects."

In brief, the participants recognize the importance of cross-cultural communication, and some will try to incorporate this socio-cultural element in their teaching. In addition, the participants mention that students might enjoy learning cultural differences, and they are eager to ask questions in which they are interested. That is, students hold a positive attitude toward learning culture, which is consistent with Omaggio's (2001) findings. In line with Hsieh's (2011) study, he found that students were motivated to learn English with sufficient information of culture-related knowledge and sociolinguistic skill practice. Students' motivation may be better enhanced with teachers' proper instructional task designs that raise students' awareness of form-function mapping in a particular sociocultural situation. Probably students receiving sociolinguistic instruction in EFL contexts may perceive English more as an effective tool for international communication, and less for instrumental purposes, like passing high-stakes exams (Chern, 2006). Although some teachers endeavored to incorporate this aspect into their language classroom, whether teacher beliefs match their real teaching practices in the classroom remains to be seen. There may be some cultural, historical, or institutional factors that hinder teachers' effective integration of sociolinguistic instruction in EFL contexts (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002).

4.2 What difficulties are perceived by Taiwan's pre-service English teachers who advocated communication-based approach in teaching sociolinguistic skills?

Answers to the second research question are summarized in Table 2. Five recurrent themes of perceived difficulties were reported by the participants. First, all ten participants expressed their concerns of practicality issues like time constraints. Teaching to the test (or exam-based teaching) is a second.

Table 2. Pre-service English Teachers' Perceived Difficulties Influencing Sociolinguistic Instruction of English

Perceived Difficulties
Time constraints
Exam-oriented teaching with a heavy focus on grammar and vocabulary
Lack of culture-rich materials deprived of pragmatics
Insufficient exposure to the target culture
Diffidence in teaching sociolinguistic skills due to insufficient pragmatic competence

It seems that such practicality concerns make it very difficult for teachers to teach students the appropriate, pragmatic and functional use of the target language. For instance, the majority of participants expressed similar concern that if they want to teach students sociolinguistic skills, it is very challenging for them due to the limited time of teaching, especially in private language institutes. As P1 commented:

“Teaching grammar and vocabulary is the first priority because there are only three classes per week. If I teach students too much, then I don’t know whether it will be helpful or useful for their exam preparations.”

This shows that the major teaching concern in language classrooms is grammar and vocabulary. P1 expressed her concern about the effectiveness of teaching sociolinguistic skills because they are not typically assessed in Taiwan’s exam-driven culture. Echoing Cohen’s (2014) study, assessing sociolinguistic competence is indeed rare. In fact, sociolinguistic instruction is not commonly taught in EFL classes (Hsieh, 2011; Yu, 2018). P2 also felt the same way, and she was concerned about the issue of time constraints which are closely related to the pressure of exam preparation:

“There’re only five classes in a week...Due to the pressure of students’ exam preparation and their school assignments, it becomes very difficult to teach students sociolinguistic skills.”

P3 added, *“Since there are only 40 to 45 minutes in a class, and there are at most 5 English classes per week, I also need to help students get good scores on the exams.”* This suggests that teachers tend to teach what is tested on the exam because they do not have sufficient time to teach additional skills that are not covered in the exam. P7 also remarked:

“My main job for tutoring is to improve my students’ grades...and the pressure from students’ parents will force me to focus on students’ homework assignments... The time is so short that I cannot teach my student sociolinguistic skills.”

This result is in accordance with the findings of Li (1998) regarding the difficulties of implementing communicative language teaching (CLT). Taiwanese teachers are very likely to encounter such practicality issues like time constraints and exam preparations. Drawing on the sociocultural theory, the sociocultural contexts in Taiwan hold teachers accountable for students’ scholastic achievement. School teachers are forced to satisfy the high expectations of the stakeholders, including school administrators, government officials, and students’ parents. Teachers in this exam-driven context are under pressure and may pay no heed to the oft-neglected but important aspect in communicative competence—sociolinguistic development. To address this issue, probably sociolinguistic skills needs to be incorporated into national assessment for fostering students’ holistic, comprehensive knowledge of communicative competence.

Third, a dearth of culture-rich materials affects effective sociolinguistic teaching. The ten participants concurred that the current published textbooks (either in elementary or secondary schools) lacks pragmatic contents. For instance, P4, P5, and P8 expressed that they did not feel that the textbook publishers wove enough pragmatic contents into the textbooks. They felt that materials were mostly form-focused or drill-based in nature, without considering the pragmatic aspects of English. P9 added:

“Before the 9-year integrated curriculum guidelines, most teaching materials used by many schools did not take it [pragmatic aspects] seriously. Most teachers only focused on what the textbooks have to offer.”

P9 said that *“Most teachers only focused on what the textbooks have to offer.”* Apparently, she was not satisfied with schools not taking teaching sociolinguistic skills seriously, and her teachers only taught English without offering students additional teaching on pragmatics; however, it could have been the case that pragmatics might have been taught, but students themselves were not aware of sociolinguistic instruction (i.e. implicit instruction). Explicit instruction is arguably effective because teachers can raise students' awareness of the features by engaging students in cognitively demanding tasks (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). Ishihara (2011) found that the effect of explicit instruction was positive in general. The incorporation of explicit instruction can indeed facilitate learners' sociolinguistic development. Considering the ten participants' unanimous agreement with the lack of pragmatic content in textbooks, it might be of value to analyze the pragmatic aspects embedded in the current textbooks in future research.

The fourth perceived difficulty identified by the participants arises from the lack of exposure to the target culture. For example, P10 expressed sarcastically:

“Without exposure to the target culture, how can you expect a Taiwanese teacher who never studied or travelled abroad to teach sociolinguistic skills? That is just like building a castle in the air.”

P10 implied that if teachers need to improve their sociolinguistic skills themselves, sufficient exposure to the target culture and native-like pragmatic competence is necessary to teach sociolinguistic skills better and improve their own pragmatic skills. However, P10 regarded native-like pragmatic competence as an unrealistic and impossible goal.

Given that the participants might encounter such difficulties as insufficient contact with the target culture, future research can be conducted to investigate the strategies used to facilitate and expedite the development of pragmatic skills to deepen the understanding and compensate for the lack of sociolinguistic competence.

In fact, after the interview, the researcher asked the ten participants an additional open-ended question, *“If you think you do not have sufficient exposure to the target culture and want to improve your insufficient pragmatic skills, what would you do to improve them?”* Interestingly, most of the participants suggested movies, videos, the Internet, and online resources. Thus, investigating strategies used to promote sociolinguistic skills might be of great interest for teachers whose sociolinguistic competence is considered inadequate. According to Taguchi and Ishihara (2018), teachers can use online resources to teach students the target culture features in classroom settings. As Belz (2008) stated, synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a viable option for sociolinguistic instruction, offering EFL learners an authentic context for communication by engaging them in online communication with native speakers.

The fifth perceived difficulty refers to teachers' low confidence in sociolinguistic competence, as also pinpointed by Li (1998), Omaggio (2001), and Yu (2008). P10 contended:

“I do not think I am a native speaker of English. It is already difficult for me to have native-like grammar and vocabulary skills, let alone understanding its pragmatic aspects and teaching students sociolinguistic skills. So, I feel I am not confident enough to teach students sociolinguistic skills.”

The participant demonstrated low confidence in teaching sociolinguistic skills due to his perceived insufficient pragmatic competence. It seems that the basic skills of language are already difficult for him to master. As for the culture-related, 'deep-level' competence, it is even more difficult to acquire.

In addition, P3, P6 and P7 expressed that they consider themselves incompetent to teach sociolinguistic skills in that they did not spend time understanding the pragmatic aspects of the target language, resulting in their low confidence in sociolinguistic instruction. Also, P9 complained that *“When I was a student, my teacher did not teach me this aspect of knowledge. That is why I do not have profound pragmatic knowledge...I am not confident enough to teach [sociolinguistic skills] as a result.”*

These pre-service teachers’ diffidence in teaching sociolinguistic skills may be closely related to their perceived low sociolinguistic competence. As P3 remarked:

“I am not very confident in teaching students this skill because I am worried that what I teach might be wrong. And usually the school will not ask me to teach students this [sociolinguistic] skill. They rely on foreign teachers more because they are believed to be more capable of teaching their own language culture better.”

P3 is worried about whether she has such capabilities to impart the ‘correct pragmatic knowledge’ to students, which implies that teachers’ lack of confidence arises from their worries of failing to teach students pragmatic knowledge correctly. Additionally, the participants intuitively responded that native speakers of the target language might have a better cultural understanding and do a better job of teaching pragmatic knowledge because native speakers of English are more familiar with their own culture.

Indeed, lack of exposure to the target culture might also contribute to the lack of sociolinguistic competence, which can also affect pre-service English teachers’ confidence in teaching sociolinguistic skills (Omaggio, 2001). As P8 believed:

“Teaching this culture-related skill seems impossible in Taiwan because of the situation here. Unlike the U.S., Taiwan is an EFL environment. I do not think that I have enough confidence to teach sociolinguistic skills because of insufficient exposure to the culture.”

It is implied that exposure to the target culture is likely to affect a person’s sociolinguistic competence. Without additional culture-embedded materials that aim at raising learners’ pragmatic awareness and fostering their sociolinguistic competence by gaining cultural input, it is difficult for the non-native English teachers to teach students sociolinguistic skills effectively. Contrary to the pre-service English teachers’ beliefs, scholars like Judd (1999) mentioned that native-like pragmatic competence is not necessarily required if teachers are not native speakers. Judd (1999) articulated that it is unrealistic for non-native English teachers to be proficient in the use of native speaker norms, either language proficiency or pragmatic competence. Rather, what teachers perhaps can emphasize the use of intercultural communication strategies should cross-cultural misunderstandings occur (Dörnyei, 1995). By teaching intercultural communication strategies, teachers can help students repair the communication breakdowns, raise students’ cross-cultural awareness via multimodal materials, and embrace intercultural communication differences. An equally important consideration regarding native speaker norms is “learners’ subjectivity in the emulation of and resistance to the norms in social interaction” (Taguchi, 2011, p.303). Some learners may desire to observe the pragmatic norms of the particular culture, but others opt not to use these forms. Respecting students’ cultural identity is important in sociolinguistic instruction (Ishihara, 2010).

In brief, these 10 pre-service English teachers’ responses seem to reveal that native-like pragmatic competence is necessary to teach sociolinguistic skills effectively. However, without the culture-rich materials on pragmatic contents and the experiences of living in the English-speaking environment, the ten pre-service English teachers tended to attribute their failure in sociolinguistic instruction to the socio-cultural environment.

5. Implications and directions for future studies

Based on the research findings, the study offers three useful pedagogical implications. First, it is necessary to lengthen the time for incorporating sociolinguistic competence into language instruction by engaging students in understanding the target culture. Second, integrating sociolinguistic instruction into national language assessment might be helpful to shift attention from form-focused to form-function mapping in the exam-driven context. Third, since none of the pre-service English teachers took related courses on Sociolinguistics and TESOL, it might be helpful for them to improve sociolinguistic competence by attending workshops, reading related literature, observing classroom practices that implement sociolinguistic instruction, or watching how native English speakers use the target pragmatic features in situation comedies (i.e. Friends or The Big Bang Theory) so that teachers can improve their expertise in teaching sociolinguistic skills in cross-cultural communication.

Future research can examine whether EFL textbooks used by Taiwan's primary or secondary schools are embedded with adequate sociolinguistic instruction, investigate what strategies teachers may use to facilitate and expedite the development of sociolinguistic skills via classroom observations, and explore beliefs of learning sociolinguistic skills from the student perspective. This would help to complete a fuller picture about beliefs in SLA research on sociolinguistic studies.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of the study is to investigate pre-service teachers' beliefs of sociolinguistic instruction in EFL classes in Taiwan. Framed from a sociocultural lens, the major findings reported here are that the ten pre-service English teachers recognize the importance of teaching sociolinguistic skills in EFL classes in Taiwan because sociolinguistic instruction can arouse students' intrinsic motivation and therefore students may perceive learning English as a useful tool for international communication. However, implementing sociolinguistic instruction is not easy because these teachers may encounter such difficulties as (1) time constraints, (2) exam-based teaching, (3) materials devoid of pragmatic content, (4) little exposure to the target culture, and lastly, (5) low confidence caused by insufficient sociolinguistic competence.

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