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MA TESOL Students' Perceptions of the Relevance and Application of Sociolinguistics Course Content for Teaching Practice

การรับรู้ของนักศึกษาระดับมหาบัณฑิตหลักสูตร TESOL เกี่ยวกับความเชื่อมโยงและการประยุกต์ใช้เนื้อหารายวิชาภาษาศาสตร์สังคมกับการสอน

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Abstract

This study explored MA TESOL students' perceptions of the relevance of sociolinguistics course content and how it applies to their future teaching practices. Although sociolinguistics courses are often part of TESOL graduate programs, limited research has examined how students assess their practical value in teaching. Using a qualitative classroom-based approach, this study employed a post-course evaluation framework to examine students' perspectives on course content. Data were collected through focus group interviews with six international MA TESOL students at a private university in Thailand. The findings indicate that multilingualism and pragmatics were perceived as highly relevant due to their clear pedagogical applicability and connection to real-world communication. Meanwhile, discourse analysis and language and gender were viewed as less directly transferable to classroom practice because their pedagogical applications were unclear. In addition to the relevance of the topic, participants' reflections showed how they connected the course content to their teaching practice. Three recurring themes emerged: recognition of multilingual practices, reconsideration of norms of correctness, and awareness related to teacher agency. These shifts included greater acceptance of linguistic diversity, increased emphasis on intelligibility, and critical awareness of language ideologies, particularly native-speakerism and the professional legitimacy of non-native English-speaking teachers. Overall, although the sample size was limited, these findings highlight the importance of focusing on contextual relevance, explicit pedagogical connections, and awareness of language issues in TESOL programs to enhance reflective and socially aware teaching practices in multilingual educational contexts.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, TESOL students, teaching practice, student perceptions

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้ของนักศึกษาระดับมหาบัณฑิต หลักสูตรการสอนภาษาอังกฤษให้แก่ผู้พูดภาษาอื่น (TESOL) เกี่ยวกับความเกี่ยวข้องและการนำเนื้อหาในรายวิชาภาษาศาสตร์สังคมไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการสอนในอนาคต แม้หลักสูตร TESOL ระดับมหาบัณฑิตโดยทั่วไปมักบรรจุรายวิชาภาษาศาสตร์สังคม งานที่ศึกษาเกี่ยวกับการนำเนื้อหาวิชาดังกล่าวไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการเรียนการสอนยังมีอยู่อย่างจำกัด การศึกษานี้จึงใช้แนวทางการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพในบริบทชั้นเรียน โดยอาศัยการประเมินหลังสิ้นสุดรายวิชาเพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้ของนักศึกษา โดยเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลผ่านการสัมภาษณ์แบบกลุ่มย่อยกับนักศึกษานานาชาติหลักสูตร TESOL ระดับมหาบัณฑิต จำนวน 6 คน จากมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทย ผลการศึกษาพบว่า หัวข้อพหุภาษาและวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์มีความเกี่ยวข้องกับการสอนในระดับสูง เนื่องจากมีความเชื่อมโยงกับการสื่อสารในชีวิตจริงและสามารถนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการสอนได้อย่างชัดเจน ในขณะเดียวกัน เนื้อหาด้านการวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมและด้านภาษาและเพศสภาพถูกมองว่ามีความเชื่อมโยงกับการนำไปใช้ในชั้นเรียนโดยตรงค่อนข้างน้อย เนื่องจากนักศึกษายังไม่เห็นแนวทางการประยุกต์ใช้เชิงการสอนอย่างชัดเจน นอกจากนี้ นักศึกษายังสะท้อนถึงการนำแนวคิดจากรายวิชาภาษาศาสตร์สังคมไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการสอนภาษา โดยสามารถสรุปได้เป็นสามประเด็นหลัก ได้แก่ การตระหนักถึงการใช้พหุภาษาในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ การทบทวนบรรทัดฐานความถูกต้องทางภาษา และความตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับบทบาทของครู การเปลี่ยนแปลงดังกล่าวครอบคลุมถึงการยอมรับความหลากหลายทางภาษา การให้ความสำคัญกับความสามารถในการสื่อสารมากกว่าความถูกต้องตามมาตรฐานเพียงอย่างเดียว ตลอดจนการพัฒนาความตระหนักรู้คตินิยมทางภาษา โดยเฉพาะแนวคิดเรื่องความเป็นเจ้าของภาษาและความชอบธรรมทางวิชาชีพของครูผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษที่ไม่ใช่เจ้าของภาษา ทั้งนี้ แม้ว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างจะมีจำนวนจำกัด แต่ผลการศึกษาสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของการมุ่งเน้นความสอดคล้องกับบริบท การเชื่อมโยงเนื้อหากับการสอนอย่างชัดเจน และการตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับประเด็นด้านภาษาในหลักสูตร TESOL เพื่อส่งเสริมแนวทางการสอนที่มีการสะท้อนคิดและตระหนักรู้ทางสังคม ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับบริบทการศึกษาที่มีความหลากหลายทางภาษาในปัจจุบัน

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาศาสตร์สังคม นักศึกษาหลักสูตร TESOL การสอน การรับรู้ของนักศึกษา

Introduction

Sociolinguistics examines how language use is shaped by social factors such as context, identity, culture, and power (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Understanding the relationship between language use and social factors helps language users adapt their language choices to communicate effectively. This ability refers to sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use language appropriately across social contexts by considering factors such as audience, purpose, register, and cultural norms (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Richards & Schmidt, 2011). Thus, successful communication requires more than grammatical knowledge. It needs an understanding of how language functions in a particular social situation (Taguchi, 2021).

Regarding the relationship between sociolinguistic competence and English language teaching (ELT), sociolinguistics helps teachers focus on the appropriateness of language use across social and cultural contexts rather than on grammar correction (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). Sociolinguistic knowledge is increasingly recognized as essential for preparing English language teachers to address linguistic and sociocultural diversity and to engage in real-world communication. This competence requires explicit instruction to help learners develop their communicative effectiveness, sociocultural awareness, and pragmatic ability (Dorgham, 2024; Taguchi, 2021). In TESOL programs, particularly at the graduate level, sociolinguistics is commonly integrated into the curriculum and may be offered as either a core course or an elective. In TESOL or related programs, the sociolinguistics course often covers topics such as language variation and change, dialects, speech communities, pragmatics, discourse, language attitudes, multilingualism, and language contact (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; McKay & Hornberger, 1996; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

Despite the recognized importance of sociolinguistics in TESOL programs, research exploring students' perceptions of the relevance of course content and its application in their future teaching remains limited. The study of theoretical concepts in sociolinguistics and their value to the curriculum has been more widely discussed (Folse & Vitanova, 2006). Thus, the gap in investigating students' perceptions of course content is worth addressing, as it influences how they will apply sociolinguistic knowledge in their future teaching.

Even if course content is selected to align with the course description and objectives (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2017), the selected topics may not reflect the students' interpretation or their perceived applicability to their future teaching. Thus, evaluating students' perspectives is important because these perceptions shape how theoretical knowledge is applied in pedagogical practice (Cohen et al., 2017; Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Investigating students' evaluations of course content can therefore provide valuable insights into how sociolinguistic knowledge influences students' developing understanding of language teaching. To address this gap, this study examined MA TESOL students' perceptions of the relevance and application of the course content from their enrolled course to their future teaching. A framework for course evaluation (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010), particularly for content selection, was employed in this study. It focused on how students perceived the selected topics and their application to teaching practice after course completion. The findings are expected to inform course improvement and help instructors and curriculum designers enhance the applicability of sociolinguistic theory in ELT and related TESOL programs.

Literature Review

This section outlines the role of sociolinguistics in English language teaching, its application within TESOL, the sociolinguistic domains relevant to TESOL courses, and student perceptions of course content evaluation.

1. Sociolinguistics in Language Teaching

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language use and social factors such as context, culture, identity, and power (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Recognizing that language and social and cultural contexts are inseparable is essential for language teaching and learning. The ability to use language appropriately in social and cultural contexts is called sociolinguistic competence, a component of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). In ELT, scholars argue that developing this competence in learners often requires a pedagogical shift from focusing exclusively on structural knowledge or grammar correction to assessing the appropriateness of language use across different social and cultural contexts (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Taguchi, 2021). Learners' communicative competence depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on contextual appropriateness. They need to be aware of social meaning, the relationships among speakers, and cultural expectations that influence language use (Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Richards & Schmidt, 2011). Consequently**,** interpreting general sociolinguistic knowledge into ELT application implies that a lack of sociolinguistic competence can lead to communication failure or ineffective communication, even when learners produce grammatically correct sentences. Therefore, it is necessary to develop learners' communicative effectiveness across contexts by integrating sociolinguistic knowledge into ELT (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Byram, 2020). In line with this, recent studies have shown that implementing concepts of Global Englishes and multilingual practices can help learners communicate confidently, as these approaches reflect the realities of English use in diverse multilingual settings (Ambele, 2025; Boonsuk et al., 2021).

2. Sociolinguistics for TESOL

Theoretical concepts in sociolinguistics are commonly taught in TESOL related graduate programs, either as a core or an elective course, given their importance for prospective teachers. According to Folse and Vitanova (2006), language pedagogy has shifted toward communicative competence, emphasizing sociocultural factors over purely linguistic features. They also argue that sociolinguistics should be a core area of knowledge in TESOL teacher education curricula and that it is essential for English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers. In addition, a sociolinguistics course aims to help prospective teachers understand how social and cultural contexts shape language and why this matters for language learning and teaching (Richards, 2017). Thus, the content of a sociolinguistics course must be carefully designed. In TESOL programs, especially at the graduate level, sociolinguistics course content is commonly drawn from foundational texts. In this study, foundational sociolinguistics texts such as Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021) and Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching (McKay & Hornberger, 1996) were selected for the course content. They covered key concepts, including language variation and dialects, language and gender, pragmatics, discourse, language attitudes, multilingualism, and language contact, providing theoretical foundations and their applicability to language teaching.

In addition, perspectives on Global Englishes (GE) have recently been discussed in sociolinguistics for ELT, shifting the focus from traditional native-speaker norms toward linguistic diversity, intelligibility, and intercultural communication in multilingual contexts (Galloway & Rose, 2018; Jenkins, 2015). Such perspectives are particularly relevant in regions such as Asia, where English is widely used as a lingua franca among speakers with diverse linguistic backgrounds (Canagarajah, 2006; Ishikawa, 2016; Pickering, 2006). Recent research highlights the need to adopt perspectives on multilingual practices, such as Global Englishes and translanguaging, to prepare teachers to teach effectively in diverse multilingual classrooms (Chaisiri, 2022; Sameephet, 2025). Although the selected texts present theoretical concepts, they do not specifically address pedagogical practice in language teaching. Research still suggests a gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom application, despite recognition of the role of sociolinguistics in TESOL programs (Folse & Vitanova, 2006).

3. Topics in Sociolinguistics Course in TESOL

The topics for the sociolinguistics course in this study were drawn from several key domains in foundational sociolinguistics texts (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; McKay & Hornberger, 1996; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Concepts such as language variation and dialects, language and gender, discourse analysis, multilingualism, and pragmatics formed the course syllabus of the study. These topics were selected over other sociolinguistic domains, such as language planning or pidgins, because they most directly bridge the gap between theory and classroom application. While broader topics like language planning provide extensive knowledge of national or historical language shifts, concepts such as pragmatics, multilingualism, and language variation directly inform pedagogical decisions. A review of these topics demonstrates how they provide the conceptual foundation for teaching applications that help learners understand language use in real-world contexts.

The concept of linguistic variation includes dialect studies, which examine the diversity of language forms and their differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and pragmatics across contexts and social groups (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Learners need to recognize dialectal differences and use them appropriately rather than focusing only on a single standard form of language, as this is one component of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). This competence goes beyond grammatical accuracy, as learners need to understand why, how, and when language varies across contexts (Canale & Swain,1980). They need to explore this variation and use it effectively in real-world communication rather than focusing only on "standard" English. Limiting instruction to prescriptive language as the standard form may cause misunderstandings in real-world communication, as learners naturally encounter nonstandard forms, such as regional dialects or informal speech (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).

Language and gender is another important domain in language teaching because it reveals how language reflects gender and social identities (Nelson, 2009). The integration of gender or sexism into language teaching has been increasingly recognized in ELT due to concerns about inclusivity (Pakuła et al., 2015; Tarrayo, 2023). Addressing gender in ELT is important because it fosters an inclusive environment that respects and values individuals. When learners' identities, especially their gender, are recognized, they feel confident and have a sense of belonging, which positively supports learning engagement (Tarrayo, 2023). Teachers play an important role as agents of social change. They not only teach language but also promote

social justice and diversity in ELT, which are broader goals of ELT (Pakuła et al., 2015). However, there is still a gap in the integration of the perspective of the theoretical concept of gender inclusivity into teaching practice. Challenges such as institutional constraints or conservative cultural norms are still faced in classroom teaching.

In addition, discourse analysis focuses on language use in context, where meaning extends beyond the sentence level and is shaped by textual, social, and psychological contexts (Bonyadi, 2019; Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2005). It plays an important role in language teaching by shifting the emphasis from grammatical structures to the dynamics of communication and context-dependent factors. Rule-based teaching alone is insufficient to enhance communicative competence. Integrating discourse analysis helps learners understand and use language appropriately in authentic communication (Bonyadi, 2019; Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2005). Another role of discourse analysis in language teaching is to develop critical thinking skills and social awareness through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines power relations, ideology, and hidden meaning in texts (Bonyadi,2019). Incorporating discourse analysis into classroom practice extends learners' critical awareness of language and society and helps them become reflective learners by developing cognitive and analytical skills through authentic texts and meaningful language use (Bonyadi, 2019; Olshtain Celce-Murcia, 2005). Nevertheless, traditional rule-based teaching often fails to equip teachers to uncover hidden power relations in texts, as it demands a high level of analytical skill. Thus, the perceived theoretical value of discourse analysis and its teaching practice seems challenging.

Multilingualism is a key domain in language teaching. It emphasizes using multiple languages as resources for communication, reflecting the realities of diverse classrooms and global communication (Jenkins, 2015; Rose & Galloway, 2019). Drawing on learners' linguistic backgrounds and multiple linguistic resources develops communicative competence and makes communication more flexible (García & Li, 2014; Jenkins, 2015). This concept is called translanguaging, the fluid use of multiple languages to shape meaning (Baker, 2011). In the context of ELT, applying pedagogical translanguaging aligns with multilingualism by focusing on how teachers can strategically incorporate multiple languages to improve comprehension and foster learning engagement and confidence (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Lin, 2019).

Pragmatics is another important domain in sociolinguistics because it focuses on the appropriate use of language in context, including meaning, interaction, and social intention, which requires more than grammatical accuracy (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). Pragmatic competence is a key component of communicative competence, as learners need to know how to perform language functions appropriately across different social contexts. Failure in pragmatics may lead to misunderstandings or negative perceptions of speakers (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009). In addition, pragmatics is viewed as a dynamic, interactional process for today's global communication in multilingual contexts, where meaning is co-constructed through negotiation and shaped by speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Taguchi, 2021). Therefore, it is vital to integrate pragmatics to help learners communicate effectively, appropriately, and interculturally in the context of globalization.

Altogether, the selected sociolinguistics topics for this study offer a conceptual foundation for language teaching, and the pedagogical value, in fact, depends on prospective teachers' perceptions of their teaching application.

4. Course Content Evaluation

Course evaluation plays a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness and relevance of the course. Course content is one element of course evaluation. In general, course content selection should conform to course design principles, align with course goals and learners' needs, and ensure that learners can meaningfully apply the knowledge (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Thus, content evaluation focuses on learners' perceptions of the content's value and on how they understand and apply it in practice (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Course evaluation must be an ongoing process that helps teachers reflect on whether the course goals, materials, and activities meet learners' needs and align with the teaching context (Graves, 2000). It also helps teachers determine the usefulness, suitability, and effectiveness of course content (Nation & Macalister, 2010). In TESOL programs, course content evaluation is essential because learners' perceptions and beliefs shape how theoretical knowledge in any content area is interpreted and implemented in their pedagogical practice (Cohen et al., 2017). Thus, course content evaluation is necessary for TESOL programs to ensure continuous improvement, align with learner needs, and support pedagogical practicality in their teaching context.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study were:

1. How relevant do MA TESOL students perceive sociolinguistic topics in relation to their teaching practice?

2. To what extent do MA TESOL students interpret and intend to apply sociolinguistic concepts in their teaching practice?

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative method to examine MA TESOL students' perceptions of the relevance and applications of sociolinguistic course content to their future teaching practice. The focus group interview was conducted to allow the researcher to explore participants' interpretations and how theoretical concepts affect their application (Cohen et al., 2017; Efron & Ravid, 2013).

1. Participants and Context

The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling. They were six international students in the MA TESOL program at a private university in Thailand. English was their additional language. The sample consisted exclusively of international students, as no Thai students enrolled in this particular cohort. The inclusion criteria for the participants were not being enrolled in a sociolinguistics course in any related TESOL program, having experience teaching English in either formal or informal institutions, completing the sociolinguistics course in this study, and agreeing to participate in the study. As international students, they brought diverse linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds, which also influenced their perceptions of

how social contexts were interpreted and evaluated and of the topic's relevance to their teaching practice.

The course content was selected from well-known sociolinguistics textbooks, including *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021) and *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching* (McKay & Hornberger, 1996). The selected topics were (1) languages, dialects, and varieties; (2) speech communities and language users; (3) pragmatics; (4) language variation and change; (5) discourse analysis; (6) language and gender; and (7) multilingualism. In addition, the course contents were to match the pace of one semester of 45 hours, with alignment between the course description and objectives, which focused on the social and cultural factors that influence language use, as well as the main theories of sociolinguistics and their implications for classroom teaching and research in applied linguistics. Each topic was designed for approximately six hours, and the rest of the hours were used for related activities and class discussion. Throughout these sessions, it should be noted that the researcher taught the course under examination.

2. Instrument and Data Collection

A focus group interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams to collect data. It was held after course completion and lasted approximately two hours. An online interview was selected for convenience and helped participants feel more comfortable. They could share their perceptions freely rather than in a formal classroom setting. Audio recordings and transcripts are available in Microsoft Teams to verify data accuracy.

The framework for course evaluation in this study was specifically used for post-course evaluation (Graves, 2000; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Evaluating students' perceptions of the course content after course completion helps the researcher answer the research questions by exploring students' perceptions of the theoretical course content and its relationship to their pedagogical practice in the future. The evaluation addressed two research questions by examining students' perceptions of the relevance of course content and their interpretations and applications for future teaching practice. Interview questions conducted for the second research question included: (1) how sociolinguistic concepts are applied in teaching; (2) what changes the students have perceived in course content; (3) what awareness the students have of sociolinguistic course contents; and (4) how they use sociolinguistic knowledge to solve teaching challenges. The questions were designed based on the research questions. They were open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to gain participants' perceptions freely and helped identify emerging themes (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2013). In addition, during the interview, careful moderation was required to encourage honest reflections because the researcher was also the instructor of the course. Regarding ethical considerations, all students provided voluntary, informed consent for the data to be used only for research purposes and course development. Informed consent was obtained from all students prior to data collection.

3. Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) data-driven thematic analysis approach was used to analyze students' interview responses and address the research questions. Interview transcripts were first reviewed and coded to identify themes that emerged from students' responses. The responses focused on teaching-practice relevance, emphasizing the pedagogical application of the content

rather than general learning relevance or alignment with course objectives. The codes were then grouped into themes and verified to ensure they aligned with students' shared views. These themes were clearly described before the final analysis (Barkhuizen et al., 2024; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Pseudonymous codes (P1- P6) were used to protect participants' confidentiality.

Findings and Discussion

1. RQ1: TESOL Students' Perceptions of the Relevance of Sociolinguistic Topics to Teaching Practice

The topics of multilingualism and pragmatics were perceived as highly relevant to students' teaching practice. The excerpts from students' responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Students' Perceptions of Highly Relevant Sociolinguistics Topics

Topic	Excerpts
Multilingualism	"I think the topic of multilingualism works for me as it allows the students to use their first language. Using L1 helps them relax and feel confident. It also values and accepts students' different languages in the classroom." (P1)
	"To me, multilingualism is the most relevant topic for my future teaching. My students are elementary learners from different countries, so they use different languages. I want to create a no-threat environment and let them use their first language to help them understand English. L1 should not be forbidden." (P2)
	"For me, multilingualism really relates to my own experience. I teach in Thailand and work with students from diverse ethnic groups. They naturally use more than one language every day. If I teach students from different countries, I will allow them to use their first language so they feel comfortable and unafraid." (P3)
	"When we discussed multilingualism, I began to see that students may shift between their first and second language, or between dialects. I think using their L1 should not be a sign of low proficiency. The teachers should allow their L1. So, I think multilingualism is highly relevant to teaching today." (P5)
	"The most relevant topics for my future teaching are multilingualism and language in contact. I think the students need support by allowing them to use their L1 as long as it helps them to understand English. Using the L1 is not wrong." (P6)

Topic	Excerpts
Pragmatics	"I think pragmatics is needed for everyday communication. It helps me understand the real use of language. The teacher should not only focus on sentence correctness. When people talk, the meaning depends on context, tone, and the relationship of the speakers. So, I think this topic is very useful for teaching speaking and interaction." (P2)
	"As we know, grammar, writing, and vocabulary are important, but pragmatics really helps me understand why people have to be polite and save someone's face. Pragmatics helps me understand why people use language in a certain way." (P3)
	"I think pragmatics is the most relevant topic for English teachers. It helps me understand why we need to communicate politely and appropriately, and not to harm the other person's face. When we understand pragmatics, we can help students avoid misunderstandings when they talk to foreigners." (P4)
	"Many times, we focus on grammar, writing, and vocabulary, but when it comes to real language use, we need to understand pragmatics. It is very important for teaching, especially when we show students how to speak or write politely and appropriately in different contexts." (P5)

Table 1 shows that multilingualism and pragmatics were perceived as highly relevant topics for students' current and future teaching practice. Specifically, participants such as P1 and P2 revealed that multilingualism enhances an inclusive classroom environment and recognizes students' first language. Instead of viewing students' L1 as a problem or a forbidden language, participants began to recognize it as a useful teaching resource for fostering a low-anxiety, supportive learning environment. Their perspectives suggest the shift from traditional monolingual norms to the inclusive perspective of multilingualism, which recognizes and emphasizes the importance of the learners' full linguistic abilities in the English classroom (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; García & Li, 2014). Their perspectives appeared to reflect critiques of traditional TESOL, which often prioritize native-speaker or monolingual norms over actual communicative needs (Nitsaisook et al., 2025; Sameephet, 2025). Additionally, these concerns align with the acknowledgment of multilingual realities and of English as a global language used by diverse speakers (Jenkins, 2015; Galloway & Rose, 2018). Instead of broadly critiquing traditional TESOL, the participants valued multilingualism for its practical classroom benefits, particularly the use of L1 to lower learner anxiety and increase confidence. Thus, the content of multilingualism appeared highly relevant because prospective teachers perceived the reality of linguistic diversity in real-world communication, which should also be reflected in the ELT classroom.

Participants also agreed that the content of pragmatics was highly relevant, as this knowledge is needed for everyday communication. Understanding politeness, register, face-saving strategies, and context-sensitive language use is important for teaching effective communication, especially in speaking and interaction. Three participants (P2, P3, and P5) revealed that their previous teaching experience had primarily focused on grammar correction, with a lack of attention to how language is used in real social contexts. Their perceived gap resulted from a lack of attention to pragmatics, reflecting the need for pragmatic knowledge in ELT preparation. In addition, the participants' reflections revealed a shift toward recognizing the crucial role of pragmatics, particularly regarding politeness, face-saving, and the appropriateness of language use. Their realization aligns with the notion that pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge are important components of language teaching, as they help learners use language appropriately and effectively across different social contexts, rather than focusing solely on grammar (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Canale & Swain, 1980). Taguchi (2021) also suggests that pragmatic competence is dynamic and develops through interaction rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms. Despite the fact of its importance, the content of pragmatics is usually not taught as a separate course in many TESOL programs; it is often integrated into related courses such as teaching language skills, second language acquisition, or intercultural communication (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009). Thus, participants appeared to fill a gap in their knowledge through engagement with pragmatics content, which explains why they viewed this topic as highly relevant to their future teaching practice.

So, the contents of multilingualism and pragmatics were perceived as most relevant, as the participant can apply them practically rather than as theoretical content. To illustrate, teachers can demonstrate the relevance of pragmatics through pedagogical activities such as role-play, in which learners can practice making requests or apologizing in different social contexts, followed by feedback on the appropriateness of their language choices.

The examination of topics less relevant to their teaching is presented in Table 2, with excerpts illustrating them.

Table 2

Students' Perceptions of Less Relevant Sociolinguistics Topics

Topic	Excerpts
Discourse Analysis	"I think discourse analysis is a little too advanced for us. It seems quite broad and hard to relate to classroom teaching. It seems more useful for journalists or researchers than for teachers like us." (P2)
	"Discourse analysis seems like a more advanced topic for us. I think it needs a lot of interpretation as it goes beyond the meaning of words. It also feels broad enough to be taught as a separate course, and I do not yet see its direct practical application to teaching speaking." (P4)

Topic	Excerpts
Language and Gender	"I find it a bit challenging to connect language and gender to my teaching. The topic looks too broad and isn't directly relevant to classroom practice. We can't interpret speakers solely through gender roles because we need to consider social contexts and cultural background as well." (P5)
	"Language and gender seem complicated to me. From my teaching experience, focusing on language use and situations already feels enough. This topic can be personally difficult for me to interpret and apply. It also feels quite sensitive because of my personal and cultural background." (P6)

As shown in Table 2, participants revealed that discourse analysis and language and gender were less relevant to their teaching contexts. The perception of lower relevance stemmed from their uncertainty about how to apply these topics in their teaching context, rather than their perceived theoretical importance. From the excerpts, two participants suggested that the idea of discourse analysis was quite abstract and complex for their teaching application. They found that it was conceptually "advanced" and complex, especially in speaking lessons. Their perceptions align with scholars such as Bonyadi (2019) and Olshtain and Celce-Murcia (2005), who argue that teaching discourse analysis is challenging because it requires students to engage in critical and interpretive analysis. According to these scholars, meaning in discourse goes beyond the sentence level and is not derived from the meaning of words. Thus, due to uncertainty about how to apply discourse concepts in teaching practice, teachers may need explicit pedagogical guidance to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Discourse competence would help students evaluate both spoken and written texts critically by drawing on real communication across different social contexts.

Participants also mentioned that language and gender were likely less relevant to their teaching context. Although the topic of language and gender has been increasingly recognized in ELT for inclusivity concerns (Tarrayo, 2023), some students were unsure about how to raise gender-related issues during classroom activities. Similar hesitation has also been reported by Tarrayo (2023), who notes that teachers often feel ill-equipped to teach gender-related topics due to limited resources, uncertainty about terminology, cultural sensitivities, and strong traditional beliefs. As revealed by P6, the participant stated that topics related to gender conflict with personal beliefs and face cultural resistance. This reluctance aligns with research in ELT, which indicates that gender perspectives have been marginalized or only minimally addressed in teaching materials. Consequently, as previous studies suggest, teachers and students tend to use non-gender-neutral language because it is common for them (Gray, 2013; Porreca, 1984). Discussion of gender topics can be uncomfortable because it involves gender identity, which teachers may feel unprepared to address in the lesson (Nelson, 2009). The difficulty of engaging with gender-sensitive topics is also influenced by factors such as a lack of institutional support, inadequate teacher training, and strong traditional beliefs. These factors can limit the incorporation of gender topics in ELT classrooms (Nelson, 2009; Paiz, 2017). Tarrayo (2023) also argues that the resistance to integrating language and gender is deeply rooted in conservative religious and cultural values among the students and communities.

These established social and cultural norms lead to gender being seen as controversial or less relevant in language classrooms. However, the lower relevance of the gender topic should not be seen as a rejection or discouragement of gender perspectives in their future language teaching.

2. RQ2: TESOL Students' Interpretations and Intended Applications of Sociolinguistic Concepts in Teaching Practice

Three recurring themes emerged from participants' responses regarding how they understood and applied sociolinguistic knowledge to teaching practice: appreciation of multilingualism, rethinking correctness in English teaching, and addressing native-speakerism while developing teacher agency.

2.1 Recognizing Multilingual Practices in English Teaching

The first theme highlights that all six participants expressed appreciation for multilingualism and support for using learners' native languages in English classrooms. Participants described multilingual practices in ELT as recognizing and valuing students' diverse linguistic resources rather than treating them as obstacles to learning. For instance, P1 expressed that "multilingual education values and accepts students' various languages in the classroom," while P3 revealed that "balancing standard English with the mother tongue helps make the class more engaging and interesting." Furthermore, P3 and P5 also showed their understanding of multilingual practices, such as translanguaging and code-switching, as used naturally and helpful for comprehension. Response from P2 is an example:

> "Learning about multilingualism really expanded my understanding of how language is actually used in real life. I realized that switching languages or translanguaging is something we already do naturally in a multilingual society. Before, I didn't really think about it; we just did it. But after this course, I understand what is happening and why people use languages that way. It changed how I see language use, not as something wrong, but as something meaningful." (P2)

The beliefs about language use have also been demonstrated among the participants. Instead of viewing the mixing of learners' native language and the target language as inappropriate, they now recognize that learners' L1 is helpful. As one participant explained:

> "Before, I thought mixing languages was wrong and even a bad habit. Now I see practices like code-switching or translanguaging as something that actually helps students learn." (P3)

Another participant highlighted the emotional advantages of permitting L1 use in the classroom.

> "I think we should allow students to use their first language when they need it because it makes them feel safe and more confident. In many classrooms, non-standard English is treated as incorrect, and I feel that this can really harm students' confidence." (P5)

The responses above showed that the participants appeared to shift their beliefs about language use regarding multilingual practices in the classroom. Many participants revealed that mixing languages was considered incorrect. The learners' native language was not allowed in the classroom. From sociolinguistic knowledge, they have begun to recognize that alternating languages, such as code-switching or translanguaging between learners' L1 and the target language, is part of multilingual communication and assets for language learning. These transformative perspectives are consistent with the principle of translanguaging, which values learners' linguistic repertoire as it supports comprehension in multilingual classrooms (Chaisiri, 2022; García & Li, 2014). According to Baker's (2011) note, translanguaging is the fluid use of multiple languages to shape meaning. Awareness of how to apply translanguaging aligns with multilingualism, as participants reveal, and is supported by research suggesting that multilingual practices can foster learning engagement and boost learners' confidence in diverse classrooms (Lin, 2015). Additionally, supporting an inclusive learning environment and comprehension can be achieved by integrating learners' linguistic repertoires into English instruction. This perspective is also consistent with Yan's (2022) argument that sociolinguistics helps teachers move beyond traditional methods that focus on grammatical correctness and isolated vocabulary, integrating social context into their teaching. They should view language as a dynamic tool shaped by social factors and identities. More importantly, drawing on their status as international students in diverse linguistic environments, they realized that increasing multilingual language awareness is essential for language teachers to meet the needs of 21st-century classrooms due to the impact of global mobility (Garcia, 2008). To bring this understanding into the classroom, teachers can incorporate activities that encourage translanguaging, such as using students' L1 during brainstorming sessions before writing tasks. They can also focus on translating culturally specific concepts into English by having students collaborate to explain words, traditions, or ideas in their native language. These activities can help students draw on their linguistic resources while learning English.

Five participants reconsidered the notion of "correct" English that must strictly follow grammar rules, based on their previous teaching experience. Now they are more concerned with the students' identities, social backgrounds, and communicative needs. As one participant reflected:

> "Before, I believed English should follow strict rules, but now I understand that teaching needs to consider students' culture, identity, and social background. It's not just about language skills anymore. We need to be flexible and think about who our students are and where they come from." (P2)

The response from P2 demonstrated an emerging awareness of the importance of integrating students' cultures and social contexts into language learning, aligning with Elmahidi et al.'s (2023) argument that language learning is inseparable from culture. Focusing solely on grammar or a structural approach does not help students communicate appropriately in a cultural context.

The participants also acknowledged that non-standard or local accents should not be regarded as errors. Effective communication should prioritize intelligibility and clarity instead of focusing on British or American accents. As the participants explained:

> "I think all accents should be accepted. Some students may want to sound more American or British, especially if they plan to study abroad, but others just want to be understood internationally. For me, communication matters more than having one correct accent, so I don't force students to speak in only one way." (P4)

> "I don't think we need to follow native-speaker standards. English is used all over the world, and different varieties are still valid forms of English. If students only hear American or British accents, they might think those are the only 'correct' ones. But in reality, they will communicate with many different kinds of English speakers. I think accent is part of identity, not something to be ashamed of." (P6)

Another participant similarly reflected on a shift in perspective regarding norms of correctness:

> "I used to be very strict about correcting students to speak perfect English, but this course helped me realize that accent is part of culture and identity. We shouldn't dismiss students by saying their accents aren't good. I really think that pushing students to sound like native speakers is not a good idea, as long as their communication is understandable." (P5)

The responses above show participants' reconsideration of beliefs about prioritizing British or American accents as standard varieties. They recognized that accents represent cultural expression and linguistic identity. They have increasingly realized that diverse accents meaningfully represent speakers' identities, which requires flexibility and sensitivity in teaching practice rather than viewing them as problems to be corrected. This transformative idea aligns with critiques of the traditional ELT approach, which idealize native speakers' accents and position English as primarily belonging to native-speaker contexts such as the United Kingdom or the United States (Holliday, 2006; Milroy, 2001). This idea stresses the distinction between "native" and "non-native" speakers as a binary that often favors native speakers while marginalizing non-native speakers and sustaining the belief in a "correct" form of English (Harwood & Giles, 2005; Milroy & Milroy, 2012). In addition, the emergence of participants' awareness of English as a plural language and recognition of the diversity of English used in international communication aligns with research on Global Englishes (GE) pedagogies, which argue that ELT should move beyond the traditional idea of privileging native speakers to focus on students' communicative legitimacy (Ambele, 2025; Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Boonsuk et al., 2021; Rose & Galloway, 2019). The participants' responses also revealed a shift from viewing nonnative speakers' accents as defective communicators to valuing them as cultural expressions and personal identities (Taguchi, 2021). This perspective reflects awareness that linguistic norms are shaped by context, purpose, and identity, rather than by idealized native-speaker models. When learners feel that their identities and accents

are recognized rather than marginalized, classrooms are more likely to become supportive and engaging in authentic real-world communication (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Fang & Baker, 2021). However, one participant, despite agreeing with the concept of English diversity, expressed that the GE approach is somewhat idealized. In a realistic view, passing high-stakes standardized exams and the preference for native-like pronunciation are still expected by many schools and students. This contrastive perspective revealed the tension prospective teachers face between the institutional expectation that "correct" be native-like and the call to develop sociolinguistic awareness in teaching practice. In conclusion, the participants' responses suggested a reconsideration of the concept of "correct English", particularly regarding accent diversity. This suggests that understanding sociolinguistics changes their beliefs in a structural approach by incorporating social contexts in their future teaching. While the second theme reflects the development of pedagogical awareness of correctness in English teaching, the third theme extends this discussion by emphasizing critical perspectives on language ideologies, professional legitimacy, and policy-related constraints shaping English teaching.

2.2 Challenging Native-Speakerism and Developing Teacher Agency

Four participants questioned the assumption that native speakers are inherently more qualified to teach English. Instead, they emphasized professional qualities such as teaching experience, empathy, and an understanding of learners' challenges. Their reflections revealed growing awareness of how native-speakerism influences perceptions of teacher competence and professional recognition in ELT. P6 highlighted this perspective, stating, "You don't have to be a native speaker to be a good teacher; experience and empathy matter more." Another participant, P2, further reflected on the advantages of being a non-native English-speaking teacher:

> "Being a non-native English teacher is actually an advantage because we understand students' challenges. Learning a language is very different from acquiring it naturally, and because we've gone through that process ourselves, we face many of the same difficulties as our students." (P2)

The reflection from P2 revealed that being a non-native English speaker is an asset in a career rather than a disadvantage. The participant has shifted the benchmark of competence from native speakers to the shared language-learning experiences between teachers and students as non-native speakers, highlighting it as a benefit for teaching practice. Previous research similarly shows that non-native English-speaking teachers possess important pedagogical advantages, including a deeper understanding of learners' challenges and greater empathy for students' learning experiences (Aneja, 2016; Kim, 2011). These perspectives challenge the ideology of native-speakerism, which Holliday (2006) defines as privileging native English speakers as ideal teachers and linguistic models while marginalizing non-native English-speaking teachers. Scholars have long criticized the "native-speaker fallacy," which favors native English speakers while historically marginalizing qualified non-native English-speaking teachers in professional settings (Phillipson, 1992; Selvi, 2011). In line with this perspective, the findings of this study, particularly participants' emphasis on teaching experience and the value placed on empathy, highlight the importance of prioritizing professional skills and teaching expertise over linguistic background (Leonard, 2019; Selvi et al., 2024).

By questioning the binary distinction between native and non-native teachers (Moussu & Llurda, 2008), participants viewed teaching competence as based on pedagogical skills and intercultural understanding rather than birthplace. From this perspective, teacher legitimacy in TESOL is more closely associated with professional competence than with native-speaker status (Leonard, 2019). Recent research further suggests that challenging native-speakerism through identity-oriented teacher education enables non-native English teachers to exercise agency, renegotiate professional identities, and affirm their legitimacy as qualified educators (Kim, 2011; Yang & Forbes, 2025).

Beyond teacher identity, participants also questioned institutional policies and hiring policies that often favor native-speaker English teachers. As P2 argued, "Policy makers should focus on teachers' ability to teach, not their accent or passport." This is not simply an individual belief; recruitment practices informed by institutional policies have been embedded with the concept of native-speakerism (Sameephet, 2025; Selvi et al., 2024). The concerns about recruitment and workplace practices reflect an inequality in ELT in sustaining native speaker ideology. Research has shown that schools often privilege native English speakers because of institutional reputation and parental expectations (Noknoi & Prabjandee, 2024). Similarly, Selvi et al. (2024) argue that native speakerism promotes preconceived notions about teachers' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and their teaching competence. Additionally, institutions continue to prioritize accent and appearance over teaching skills and to discourage qualified non-native English teachers (Aneja, 2016; Holliday, 2006; Sameephet, 2025). The questions about preferences regarding nationality or accent in hiring practices revealed participants' awareness that language ideologies influence not only the classroom but also institutional decision-making. Their concerns align with broader academic critiques of native-speakerism and the institutional inequalities it creates in ELT (Selvi et al., 2024; Yan, 2022).

The findings for Research Question 2 suggest that the participants engaged critically with sociolinguistic knowledge. They recognized multilingual practices in English education as valuable resources for fostering more inclusive learning environments. Their acknowledgment reveals a reconsideration of the traditional notion of correctness, especially the standard accent, emphasizing the inclusivity of identity and social context rather than strict linguistic accuracy. Building on these perspectives, participants also questioned native-speakerism and its implications for their agency as teachers. They critically reflected on the strengths of being non-native English teachers, the challenge to native-speaker ideologies, and the need for equitable hiring practices.

Conclusion

This study examined MA TESOL students' perceptions of the relevance of sociolinguistics course content and its application to their future teaching practices. The relevance of practical classroom practice for selected topics was primarily evaluated. Multilingualism and pragmatics were considered highly relevant because they are connected to multilingual learning contexts and authentic communication in real-world settings. Meanwhile, discourse analysis and language and gender were evaluated as less relevant due to the complexity of the topics and unclear pedagogical applications. Thus, the students' perceptions of the topics' relevance reflected the clarity of their practical classroom applications rather than their theoretical importance.

Beyond topic relevance, students' professional awareness and shifts in their beliefs about language teaching were also uncovered. Understanding sociolinguistic concepts encourages them to reconsider teaching strategies in ELT by emphasizing multilingual practices, placing less emphasis on correctness, especially accents, and prioritizing intelligibility and effective communication across diverse social contexts. Students also demonstrated awareness of language ideologies regarding native speakerism that affects their perceptions of the legitimacy of non-native English teachers' teaching. However, it is noteworthy that these findings were based on students' perceptions collected immediately after the course, not on observations of implementation in real classroom teaching.

Despite these findings, the study's limitations are also acknowledged. Because the number of international students enrolled in the sociolinguistics course for this study was relatively small, the results may not generalize to other MA TESOL or related ELT programs. Moreover, their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, in which English is not their L1, may increase awareness of multilingualism and accent diversity and move away from native speakerism. Future studies should include a broader and more diverse range of related programs in TESOL to address this study's limitation. Furthermore, for complex topics such as discourse analysis and language and gender, designing explicit pedagogical activities to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and teaching practice in a sociolinguistics course is highly recommended. The program may include activities such as small teaching sessions, reflective practice, or lesson planning that align with selected content in a sociolinguistics course syllabus to bridge theoretical knowledge and pedagogical implementation. Overall, this study contributes to the design of a sociolinguistics course by demonstrating that the course's effectiveness depends not only on selecting relevant theoretical concepts but also on preparing students with the practical teaching experience needed to apply those concepts in the classroom for their future teaching.

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