

THE ROLE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN SHAPING EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Wildhan Burhanuddin

English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Muhammadiyah
University of Makassar

wildhan@unismuh.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement among Indonesian EFL learners. Using a mixed-methods design, the research combined quantitative analysis of scenario-based questionnaire responses with interpretive commentary of learners' written answers. Descriptive results showed that students demonstrated strong pragmatic awareness in authority-related contexts but more variability in informal and ambiguous situations. Reliability analysis indicated that sociolinguistic competence is multidimensional rather than uniform. Inferential statistics revealed a moderate positive correlation between sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement, while qualitative analysis highlighted the influence of cultural scripts of deference, harmony, and accountability on learners' communicative choices. These findings underscore that willingness to communicate is not determined solely by linguistic ability but is shaped by sociocultural orientations and identity negotiations. Pedagogically, the study calls for greater integration of pragmatic and sociolinguistic instruction in EFL classrooms, emphasizing both authority-based and peer-oriented interactions. The study concludes that fostering pragmatic awareness within cultural contexts can enhance learners' confidence and participation, supporting their development as contextually responsive communicators.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic competence, Communicative engagement, Willingness to communicate, Pragmatics, EFL learners.

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1. Introduction

The ability to engage meaningfully in communication is widely regarded as a core goal of second language learning, yet many EFL learners remain hesitant to participate in authentic interaction even after years of instruction. This phenomenon has prompted a growing interest in the sociolinguistic dimensions of language competence, which encompass the ability to use language appropriately according to context, interlocutor, and cultural norms (Canale & Swain, 1980). While grammatical competence has traditionally dominated EFL classrooms, sociolinguistic competence underpins the appropriateness and acceptability of language use in real-life communication (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). It enables learners to navigate diverse communicative situations, manage interpersonal relationships, and interpret implicit social meanings (Taguchi, 2011). Without such competence, learners may possess the linguistic resources to produce sentences yet lack the pragmatic sensitivity to engage in socially coherent and culturally resonant interaction (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Research has increasingly emphasized that sociolinguistic competence develops through socially mediated encounters rather than decontextualized language drills. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory frames language learning as a culturally situated activity in which knowledge emerges through participation in social practices. Learners' exposure to authentic interactional norms and cultural conventions enhances their ability to select appropriate forms, registers, and speech acts (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Studies have shown that when EFL students are immersed in tasks that simulate authentic communication, they demonstrate greater sociolinguistic awareness and adaptability (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). These findings suggest that language learning should be viewed not only as acquiring linguistic code but also as developing the competence to interpret and enact social meanings within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In multilingual and multicultural environments, the role of sociolinguistic competence becomes even more critical. As English increasingly serves as a lingua franca, communication often occurs between speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds who bring different interactional norms (Seidlhofer, 2011). Misalignments in politeness strategies, turn-taking, and speech styles can disrupt communication and cause anxiety or withdrawal among learners (Yashima, 2002). Research in English as a lingua franca (ELF) contexts has highlighted that

communicative success depends less on native-like accuracy than on pragmatic flexibility and sociocultural sensitivity (Jenkins, 2007). Learners who are able to interpret interlocutors' intentions and adapt their discourse styles are more likely to sustain communication and build interpersonal rapport (Matsumoto, 2011).

In EFL classrooms, however, sociolinguistic competence is often marginalized or treated implicitly. Many instructional approaches still prioritize structural accuracy and standardized assessments, leaving little space for sociocultural variation (Lee, 2010). This imbalance contributes to a persistent gap between classroom performance and real-world communicative behavior (LoCastro, 2012). In Asian EFL contexts in particular, studies have documented learners' reluctance to speak despite adequate grammatical knowledge, attributing this reticence partly to sociolinguistic insecurity and fear of pragmatic failure (Peng, 2013; Liu & Jackson, 2008). The lack of explicit instruction in culturally appropriate language use may exacerbate students' communication apprehension and limit their participation in interaction (Woodrow, 2006).

Understanding how sociolinguistic competence relates to learners' actual communicative engagement is thus crucial for fostering more effective EFL pedagogy. Previous studies have linked pragmatic competence with learners' willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998), suggesting that students who perceive themselves as socially and culturally capable are more inclined to initiate conversation. Sociolinguistic knowledge may function as a confidence-building resource, reducing learners' perceived risks in interaction (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Moreover, learners who acquire cultural scripts and discourse norms often report higher motivation to participate in L2 communication, viewing it as an opportunity for social affiliation and identity expression (Norton, 2000; Yashima, 2009).

In the Indonesian EFL context, where English is primarily learned as a foreign language with limited authentic interaction opportunities, sociolinguistic development poses particular challenges. Formal instruction tends to emphasize reading and grammar, while pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects are rarely assessed (Widodo, 2016). Students may thus enter higher education with substantial linguistic knowledge but little experience in adapting language use to varied social situations. This gap not only hinders their communicative competence but also constrains their participation in global academic and professional communities (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Addressing this challenge requires empirical understanding of how learners' sociolinguistic resources shape their communicative behavior in classroom

settings.

The present study responds to this need by examining the role of sociolinguistic competence in shaping EFL learners' communicative engagement. By investigating students' sociolinguistic awareness and their self-reported communication behaviors, this research seeks to illuminate how cultural and pragmatic knowledge supports learners' readiness to speak. Such insights are essential for designing pedagogical approaches that move beyond structural accuracy to cultivate socially responsive and culturally grounded communicators. This endeavor aligns with broader calls in language education to reframe communicative competence as a socially situated construct that integrates linguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions (Byram, 1997; Canagarajah, 2013). Understanding the sociolinguistic underpinnings of communicative engagement can help teachers foster more inclusive, confidence-building, and interaction-oriented EFL classrooms.

This study was epistemologically anchored in an interpretive paradigm which views learner beliefs and competencies as socially situated and constructed through experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While adopting a quantitative survey design, the study sought to interpret students' self-reported sociolinguistic competence and their patterns of communicative engagement as reflections of their sociocultural positioning as language learners. The interpretive stance acknowledges that learners' perceptions are shaped by their learning histories and by the cultural norms that govern their classroom discourse (Duff, 2014). This design allowed the study to identify relational tendencies between sociolinguistic competence and communicative behavior while recognizing the social meanings students attribute to their linguistic performance (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

2. Research context and participants

The study was conducted at a public university in Indonesia where English is taught as a foreign language within an academic English program. The participants were undergraduate students who had completed at least four semesters of formal English courses. In the Indonesian context, English is introduced from elementary school yet remains primarily a classroom subject with limited opportunities for authentic interaction outside school (Kirkpatrick, 2010). This context often produces learners with relatively strong grammatical knowledge but limited pragmatic and sociolinguistic exposure (Widodo, 2016). The participants were selected through convenience sampling based on their enrollment in English communication courses. Ninety-seven students voluntarily completed the questionnaire after

informed consent was obtained. All participants had multilingual backgrounds speaking Bahasa Indonesia as the national lingua franca alongside local languages, and most had studied English for more than six years. Their diverse linguistic repertoires were considered relevant for exploring how learners mobilize sociolinguistic resources to engage in classroom communication (Garcia & Wei, 2014).

Instrument and data collection procedures

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that measured two main constructs: sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement. The sociolinguistic competence items were adapted from existing models of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995) and reflected knowledge of language variation, use of appropriate forms across social situations, politeness conventions, and sensitivity to interlocutor roles. The communicative engagement items were designed to capture learners' willingness to initiate interaction, respond to others, and sustain conversation in classroom and peer settings, drawing conceptually on the willingness to communicate model (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998) while emphasizing observable engagement behaviors. Items were developed through a literature-informed process and underwent expert review by two EFL specialists to ensure content validity (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). A five-point Likert scale was used to capture participants' degree of agreement.

The questionnaire was administered online through a secure platform during the second half of the semester. Students were briefed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Ethical approval was obtained from the faculty's research ethics committee, and participants were informed that their decision to participate or withdraw would not affect their academic standing. The survey required approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Collecting data at this stage of the semester ensured that participants had sufficient experience in their communication courses to provide informed responses about their engagement patterns.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed a two-step process. First, descriptive statistics were generated to provide an overview of participants' reported levels of sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement. Mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were computed to examine general trends. Second, inferential analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the two constructs. Pearson product-moment correlation was

used to determine the strength and direction of the association between sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement scores. This approach aligns with the study's aim to identify patterns of co-variation rather than to establish causal relationships (Dörnyei, 2007). Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and all subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency above the conventional threshold of .70 (Field, 2018).

To preserve the interpretive orientation of the study, statistical findings were not treated as absolute measurements but as indicative patterns that reflect participants' perceived competencies and behaviors. Quantitative analysis was supplemented by interpretive commentary situating the findings within the sociocultural context of the participants. This approach recognizes that learners' self-perceptions of competence and engagement are influenced by their prior learning experiences, classroom norms, and the social values attached to English communication in their communities (Norton, 2000; Ushioda, 2011). Such an interpretive layer allows the analysis to move beyond numerical patterns to meaningful understandings of how sociolinguistic competence shapes learners' willingness and readiness to engage in communication.

3. Results and Discussion

Overall Sociolinguistic Competence

The descriptive statistics of the total scores are presented in Table 1. The majority of students scored between 5 and 6, representing moderate sociolinguistic competence, while only a small proportion reached the highest scores of 7 and 8. The bar chart in Figure 1 visualizes this clustering, showing that 40% of the participants were positioned at score 6. This indicates that most students have emerging awareness of context-sensitive communication, although a limited number demonstrated consistently advanced sociolinguistic control.

Table 1. Distribution of Sociolinguistic Competence Scores (N = 40)

Score	Frequency	Percentage
3	1	2.5%
4	6	15.0%
5	9	22.5%
6	16	40.0%
7	6	15.0%
8	2	5.0%

The scenario-level responses are summarized in Table 2. In scenarios involving

hierarchical relationships with authority (e.g., apologizing for lateness or damaging a teacher's book), the majority of students selected pragmatically appropriate responses ($\geq 85\%$). In contrast, more variation appeared in lower-stakes or ambiguous scenarios such as falling asleep in class or handling phone interruptions, where a significant proportion chose less optimal strategies. These patterns highlight that while learners have internalized politeness strategies in clear authority-based contexts, their pragmatic control is less consistent in everyday or ambiguous situations.

Item-Level Response Patterns

The frequencies and percentages of responses for each of the ten sociolinguistic scenarios are summarized in Table 2. Each item represents a situational judgment task requiring the learner to select a pragmatically appropriate response.

Table 2. Response Distribution across Sociolinguistic Scenarios

Item	Choice	Frequency	Percentage
Situation 1	A	37	92.5%
	B	3	7.5%
Situation 2	A	34	85.0%
	B	6	15.0%
Situation 3	A	28	70.0%
	B	6	15.0%
	C	6	15.0%
Situation 4	A	33	82.5%
	B	5	12.5%
	C	2	5.0%
Situation 5	A	23	57.5%
	B	17	42.5%
Situation 6	A	32	80.0%
	B	5	12.5%
	C	3	7.5%
Situation 7	A	34	85.0%
	B	5	12.5%
	C	1	2.5%
Situation 8	A	23	57.5%
	B	14	35.0%
	C	3	7.5%
Situation 9	A	35	87.5%
	B	4	10.0%
	C	1	2.5%
Situation 10	A	37	92.5%
	B	3	7.5%

The table shows that across nearly all items, the majority of students selected the pragmatically appropriate response option (typically coded as Choice A). For example,

Situation 1 and 10 yielded 92.5% correct responses, reflecting strong awareness in contexts involving authority figures and material damage. However, certain scenarios produced more distributed responses, such as Situation 3 and 5, where students displayed greater hesitation or divergent strategies. These variations suggest that students are more confident in high-stakes politeness contexts but less consistent when confronted with situations involving peer visibility or everyday disruptions. This aligns with Kasper and Rose's (2002) observation that learners' pragmatic competence tends to be uneven, with greater accuracy in formulaic contexts and less certainty in ambiguous situations.

Reliability of the Instrument

Internal consistency of the ten sociolinguistic items was examined using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient was 0.33, which falls below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Field, 2018). This finding indicates that the items do not form a highly homogeneous scale, reflecting the context-specific nature of sociolinguistic competence. Students may demonstrate sensitivity in some pragmatic contexts but not in others, underscoring that pragmatic knowledge is multi-faceted rather than unidimensional (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Table 3. Reliability of Sociolinguistic Competence Questionnaire

Measure	Value
Cronbach's Alpha	0.33
Number of Items	10

Inferential Analysis

Correlation between Sociolinguistic Competence and Engagement

Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement. The analysis revealed a significant moderate positive correlation ($r = .35$, $p = .027$). This indicates that students with higher sociolinguistic competence scores tended to report higher levels of communicative engagement, suggesting that pragmatic awareness may facilitate learners' willingness to participate in interaction.

Table 4. Correlation between Sociolinguistic Competence and Engagement (N = 40)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2
1. Sociolinguistic competence	5.72	1.43	—	.35*
2. Communicative engagement	5.67	1.14	.35*	—

Group Comparison by Competence Level

To further explore this relationship, students were divided into low- and high-competence groups using a median split. An independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference in engagement between the two groups, $t(38) = -1.03, p = .317$. However, the effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.36$) suggested a small-to-moderate practical difference, with the high-competence group reporting higher engagement on average ($M = 5.93$) compared to the low-competence group ($M = 5.50$).

Table 5. Comparison of Engagement between Low and High Sociolinguistic Competence Groups

Group	N	Mean Engagement	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Low competence ($\leq$ median)	26	5.50	1.08	-1.03	.317	0.36
High competence ($>$ median)	14	5.93	1.17			

Taken together, the descriptive results show that most students demonstrated moderate sociolinguistic awareness, with strong appropriateness in authority-related scenarios but greater variability in ambiguous or informal contexts. The reliability analysis suggests that sociolinguistic competence manifests differently across contexts rather than as a unitary trait. Inferential analyses revealed that sociolinguistic competence was significantly correlated with communicative engagement, although group-level comparisons did not yield statistically significant differences. These results highlight both the promise and complexity of sociolinguistic competence as a factor shaping EFL learners' communicative behavior.

Interpretive Analysis of Qualitative Responses

The statistical findings become more meaningful when read alongside the written responses students provided in the sociolinguistic scenarios. A recurring feature in the data was the strong orientation toward deference in interactions with authority. Many students expressed apologies in formulaic terms such as "*Saya mengerti. Saya tidak akan terlambat lagi*" ("I understand. I will not be late again"), which not only acknowledged personal fault but also reinforced the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student. This preference reflects the cultural scripts that govern Indonesian classrooms, where obedience and respect toward educators are foregrounded. Such deferential positioning helps explain why scenarios involving authority figures, such as apologizing for lateness or repairing material damage, elicited high rates of appropriate responses in the quantitative analysis.

The tendency to foreground responsibility and repair also appeared in situations involving tangible consequences. When returning a damaged book, students frequently chose expressions like "*Saya sangat menyesal. Tolong izinkan saya mengganti salinannya*" ("I am very sorry. Please allow me to replace the copy"). Here, apology was combined with an offer

of compensation, signaling sincerity and an effort to restore relational harmony. This emphasis on repair illustrates how learners draw upon sociocultural values of accountability and reciprocity to manage potentially face-threatening acts.

In contrast, the qualitative data showed more divergence in situations of everyday disruption, such as sleeping in class or being distracted. Some students responded with clear accountability, as in “*Maaf, saya akan mencoba tidak mengulangnya lagi*” (“I am sorry, I will try not to repeat it”), while others minimized their responsibility by noting, “*Maaf. Saya tidak dapat menahannya*” (“Sorry, I could not help it”). This inconsistency reflects the greater ambiguity learners experience in contexts where cultural norms are less prescriptive. It resonates with the quantitative findings that showed more variability in responses to informal or ambiguous situations than to authority-based scenarios.

A smaller but noteworthy number of students employed explicit politeness strategies when interrupting or handling disruptions. Utterances such as “*Permisi, saya ingin bertanya*” (“Excuse me, I would like to ask a question”) or “*Maafkan saya, saya akan keluar sebentar*” (“Forgive me, I will step outside for a moment”) demonstrate learners’ emerging control over discourse markers that mitigate face-threatening acts. These pragmatic choices suggest that students are developing sociolinguistic awareness through classroom exposure and social practice, even if such strategies are not yet consistently applied.

These qualitative insights situate the quantitative patterns in the broader sociocultural context of the learners. The prominence of deference, repair, and harmony maintenance echoes the values that shape classroom communication in Indonesia, while the inconsistencies in informal contexts illustrate the challenges of pragmatic transfer when cultural guidance is less explicit. Learners’ self-perceptions of competence and engagement therefore cannot be understood solely through numerical scores; they are mediated by identities, relationships, and the symbolic meanings attached to English communication in their communities (Norton, 2000; Ushioda, 2011). By integrating these interpretive insights, the analysis moves beyond statistical tendencies to a richer understanding of how sociolinguistic competence underpins learners’ willingness and readiness to communicate.

Sociocultural Dimensions of Learners’ Pragmatic Choices

The present study set out to investigate the relationship between sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement in an Indonesian EFL context. The results revealed a moderate but significant correlation, suggesting that learners who demonstrated

greater sensitivity to pragmatic appropriateness were more likely to participate in communicative events. At the same time, the relatively low reliability of the instrument indicated that competence in this domain is not uniform but context specific, varying across scenarios of authority, peer interaction, and informal disruptions. The interpretive analysis of student responses illuminated how cultural scripts of deference, harmony, and accountability shape communicative choices, showing that competence is simultaneously a linguistic and social construct. These findings underscore that communicative engagement cannot be divorced from the sociocultural conditions in which language use is situated, echoing recent calls for contextualized perspectives on willingness to communicate (Peng, 2022; Yashima, 2022).

One important insight from the study is that sociolinguistic competence operated as a confidence resource that enhanced learners' readiness to speak. This observation resonates with MacIntyre et al.'s model of willingness to communicate and is consistent with recent empirical work showing that pragmatic awareness predicts higher levels of oral participation in EFL classrooms (Lee & Lee, 2020; Zhang & Papi, 2021). The tendency of students to provide formulaic apologies to authority figures demonstrates that competence in high-stakes contexts is well internalized, while the inconsistent responses in informal situations reflect the lack of classroom emphasis on pragmatics of everyday talk. This unevenness supports Taguchi's (2019) argument that pragmatic development is domain specific and cannot be assumed to generalize across interactional settings. It also reflects the broader sociocultural orientation of Indonesian classrooms, where hierarchical relations with teachers shape students' sense of what counts as appropriate communication (Widodo & Dewi, 2021).

The interplay between competence and engagement also highlights the importance of self-perceptions and identity positioning in communicative behavior. Learners who apologized and repaired transgressions in culturally expected ways reported stronger engagement, suggesting that alignment with community norms fostered confidence. This finding echoes Ushioda's (2020) work on person-in-context relational motivation, which argues that learners' communicative choices are bound to their social positioning. Similarly, Norton and Toohey (2020) stress that language learning is an investment in identity, and learners participate more actively when their communicative practices affirm rather than threaten their sense of belonging. Recent studies in Asian EFL contexts confirm that students' willingness to participate hinges on the extent to which classroom practices validate their social identities (Choi & Lee, 2021; Chen & Lee, 2022). The present study therefore adds to this line of evidence by showing that sociolinguistic competence functions not only as a linguistic resource but also

as a marker of identity negotiation.

The low internal consistency across the ten sociolinguistic scenarios warrants careful interpretation. Rather than being a methodological weakness, this variation likely reflects the multidimensional nature of pragmatic competence. As Ishihara and Tarone (2020) note, sociolinguistic behavior involves a repertoire of strategies that are deployed differently depending on power dynamics, relational distance, and communicative goals. The observed variability aligns with research by Kim and Park (2021) which shows that learners can be highly competent in formal politeness strategies yet less adept in informal peer interactions. This pattern suggests that instruction in EFL contexts should not limit pragmatic training to deferential speech acts but should also address the less scripted domains of everyday conversation, interruptions, and peer-to-peer negotiation.

The qualitative findings further contextualize the statistical results by revealing the cultural meanings students attach to their communicative acts. Expressions of apology combined with offers of repair point to a cultural orientation toward responsibility and harmony maintenance. Minimizing responsibility in low-stakes disruptions illustrates learners' negotiation of face in situations where expectations are ambiguous. The emerging use of explicit politeness markers in interruptions shows that students are beginning to mobilize discourse strategies for managing interaction. These observations resonate with recent studies of pragmatic development in Southeast Asian contexts which emphasize that learners draw on local values of respect and collective harmony while experimenting with globalized discourse markers of English (Nguyen, 2020; Sukarno, 2021). They also illustrate what Lo and King (2022) describe as pragmatic bricolage, where learners combine inherited cultural norms with acquired L2 strategies to manage new communicative demands.

These findings highlight the pedagogical imperative of integrating sociolinguistic competence into EFL instruction. The moderate correlation with engagement shows that pragmatic sensitivity is not peripheral but central to fostering willingness to communicate. Recent interventions that embedded pragmatics into task-based instruction have shown significant gains in learners' communicative participation (Félix-Brasdefer & Koike, 2021; Matsumoto, 2022). Other studies confirm that explicit instruction in apologies, requests, and refusals leads to increased confidence in classroom discourse (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2021; Taguchi & Ishihara, 2022). In Indonesian settings, teacher-fronted methods have traditionally emphasized grammatical accuracy, but there is growing recognition that pragmatic competence must be developed if students are to participate meaningfully in academic and social

communication (Widodo, 2020; Sulistyo et al., 2021). The present study reinforces this agenda by showing that students' willingness to engage is directly linked to their ability to act appropriately in context.

In light of these findings, two pedagogical implications can be drawn. First, pragmatic instruction should be diversified to include both authority-related and informal peer contexts. Such an approach acknowledges that learners must navigate a spectrum of communicative situations, from deferential interactions with teachers to collaborative exchanges with peers. Second, opportunities for reflection on cultural scripts should be incorporated into classroom practice. As Cao and Tran (2021) argue, raising learners' awareness of the cultural underpinnings of speech acts enables them to make more informed choices when participating in L2 communication. This aligns with Canagarajah's (2020) call for a translingual orientation that recognizes learners' negotiation of multiple cultural repertoires.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how sociolinguistic competence shapes EFL learners' communicative engagement in the Indonesian context. By combining quantitative survey analysis with interpretive commentary of learners' written responses, the research revealed that sociolinguistic competence is an important but unevenly developed dimension of communicative competence. The majority of learners demonstrated sensitivity to context in interactions involving authority, accountability, and face maintenance, while showing more variability in informal or ambiguous situations. Statistical analysis confirmed a moderate positive relationship between sociolinguistic competence and communicative engagement, although group comparisons highlighted that differences in participation are complex and not always statistically significant. The interpretive analysis illustrated that learners' pragmatic choices are deeply embedded in cultural scripts of deference, harmony, and responsibility, showing that willingness to communicate is socially and culturally mediated.

These findings underscore two key insights. First, sociolinguistic competence is not a peripheral aspect of language learning but a central resource that fosters confidence and encourages participation in communicative events. Second, pragmatic knowledge cannot be separated from its sociocultural context. Learners' decisions to engage are shaped not only by their linguistic repertoire but also by their identities, cultural orientations, and classroom norms.

Pedagogically, the study highlights the need for EFL instruction that integrates explicit

attention to pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of communication. Teachers should provide opportunities for learners to practice both authority-based and peer-oriented interactions, as well as space for reflection on the cultural values that inform communicative behavior. Such practices will support learners in becoming more flexible, confident, and contextually responsive communicators.

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