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SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AND BARRIERS TO ITS IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE STUDY OF SECONDARY EFL TEACHERS IN QATAR

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ABSTRACT

Communicative competence, particularly its sociolinguistic component, is essential for effective English language teaching. However, EFL teachers face significant challenges in integrating sociolinguistic competence into classroom practice. This study examined Qatari secondary school EFL teachers' knowledge of communicative competence, their beliefs regarding the teaching of sociolinguistic competence, perceived learning needs, and major hindrances to implementation. A quantitative survey conducted with 70 EFL teachers from two secondary schools in Doha, Qatar, using purposive sampling. Data was collected through a structured 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire covering four dimensions: teachers' communicative competence knowledge, beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence, 21st-century learning needs, and perceived barriers. The instrument showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$). Results indicated strong self-reported knowledge of communicative competence ($M = 4.39$) and regular application in lesson planning ($M = 4.20$). Teachers strongly supported integrating target-culture knowledge but expressed scepticism about students' sociolinguistic awareness. The primary barriers limited to authentic exposure to English ($M = 4.41$), insufficient time for material development ($M = 4.29$), and students' difficulty understanding cultural norms. The findings highlight a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, emphasising the necessity of targeted professional development and curriculum reform in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *Communicative Competence, EFL Teachers' Hindrances, Intercultural Communication, Sociolinguistic Competence*

Introduction

Communicative competence is fundamental to effective foreign language education. It encompasses the ability to use language appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts, going beyond mere grammatical accuracy to include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). Sociolinguistic competence, a core component of communicative competence, involves knowledge and skills required to use language appropriately according to social norms, cultural expectations, and contextual variables. The ability to use language appropriately in a wide variety of social situations is at the heart of sociolinguistic competence, a complex and multi-faceted aspect of language proficiency. It necessitates an in-depth familiarity with the linguistic complexities of culture, norms, and registers as well as the grammatical and structural elements of language (Enisa & Dililitaş, 2015). This shift from language to spatial repertoire is based on the beliefs held by EFL teachers regarding sociolinguistic competence. These beliefs include things like "a social skill to use English," "it is important for learners to be able to speak appropriately and rightfully," and "learners will be able to avoid bad manner, rudeness, and lost in interaction." (Canagarajah, 2017). A key to adopting sociolinguistic competency in communication is speakers' ability to put words to use in a situated activity and specific settings, according to this notion. Always meaning sediments over time to acquire grammatical status and norms, and the utterances constructed based on this indexicality of the spatiotemporal process. Nonetheless,

Canagarajah (2017) acknowledges that standards regarding the inclusion of certain words in semiotic assemblages for the sake of meaning construction may evolve (Putra, E. R., 2021). Teachers must now focus primarily on "life skills and knowledge," with the purpose of preparing students to acquire knowledge on their own and work in ways that allow them to produce innovative ideas. New idea generation is an important aspect of modern culture. To meet the needs of students in the twenty-first century, teachers must be excellent in communicating skills.

Communication skills include four components: grammatical proficiency, sociolinguistic proficiency, discourse proficiency, and strategic proficiency (Hargie, 2011). ESL teachers not only need to adapt and improvise their lessons to utilise teaching resources which are suitable for second language learners but also cater to their students' needs to motivate them for further development of their sociolinguistic competence outside the language classroom. ESL teachers can use the findings from this study as a guide for the development of their students' sociolinguistic competence using teaching resources, and further research could be done on this topic, specifically focusing on the development of teaching resources emphasizing sociolinguistic competence (Abd Rahman et al., 2022). In Qatar's EFL context, where English serves as a key medium for global communication and education, secondary school teachers play a critical role in developing students' intercultural communicative abilities. However, integrating sociolinguistic competence into classroom practice remains challenging due to curriculum constraints, limited authentic materials, and insufficient professional development. Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely advocated, a persistent gap exists between teachers' theoretical knowledge and actual classroom implementation (Heng, 2014)

EFL secondary teachers have considerable challenges to know the characteristics of learning needs that necessarily delivered to the students to what they need to practise in real-life situations. Great discrepancy is clear in the difficulty to integrating socio-linguistic competency in the activities for intercultural communication. Consequently, EFL teachers need to comprehend both communicative and socio-linguistic competence to deliver actual teaching in the class and fully equipped learners to practise in real-life situations effectively. Further, EFL secondary teachers have little time or are unauthorized to make amendments to develop materials for enhancing socio intercultural communication in the curriculum. Literature review addresses the difficulties to understand English community in terms of culture and social behaviour. Studies have proved that EFL teachers lack exposure to teach English in terms of communicative and intercultural context efficiently for their students to enable them to interact successfully in both classroom and real-life situations. As a result, this study aims to investigate this gap by examining Qatari secondary EFL teachers' knowledge, beliefs, learning needs, and perceived hindrances regarding sociolinguistic competence.

Research Objectives: To investigate EFL secondary teachers' knowledge of communicative competence, To explore EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence, To identify the main hindrances faced by EFL secondary teachers in integrating sociolinguistic competence into the curriculum. Based on the previous objectives, the researchers have drawn questions as follows:

1. To what extent do EFL secondary teachers possess sufficient knowledge of communicative competence?
2. What are EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence in the classroom?
3. What are the primary challenges EFL secondary teachers encounter when integrating sociolinguistic competence?

Review of Literature: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become one of the most influential approaches in English language teaching since its emergence in the 1970s. Unlike traditional grammar-translation methods, CLT emphasizes meaningful communication, interaction, and the development of learners' ability to use language appropriately in real-life situations (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). In EFL contexts, particularly in non-Western countries like Qatar, the implementation of CLT has faced various challenges. Researchers have documented difficulties related to large class sizes, examination-oriented education systems, limited resources, teacher training, and cultural differences between Western-based CLT principles and local educational expectations (Heng, 2014). Despite widespread support for CLT, actual classroom practices often remain teacher-centered and grammar-focused. Sociolinguistic Competence Sociolinguistic

competence is a vital component of communicative competence. It refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to the social context, including knowledge of cultural norms, politeness conventions, registers, and pragmatic rules (Canale & Swain, 1980; Kramsch, 2014). This competence enables learners to avoid pragmatic failure and communicate effectively in intercultural encounters. As English has become the global lingua franca, sociolinguistic competence has gained increasing importance. Learners need not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to interpret and produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate (Ya, 2008; Ferguson, 2021). Without adequate sociolinguistic competence, even grammatically correct utterances may lead to misunderstanding or offense in cross-cultural communication.

Teaching Socio-Linguistic, There are two main techniques to introducing and teaching sociolinguistic proficiency. One approach is to use cultural models in which students are explicitly or implicitly taught cultural elements ingrained in language use, and/or to incorporate speech acts as situations in which learners are forced to use language while taking socio-pragmatic factors such as the hearer's social status, the degree of imposition, or the content of the request into consideration. The classroom environment may not be an appropriate setting for developing sociolinguistic ability for a variety of reasons, including a lack of authenticity in the materials' content. For example, (Izumi,1996) highlights that in establishing sociolinguistic expertise, most non-native speakers (NNS) who teach English confront problems such as their own lack of knowledge, current curriculum requirements, diverse teaching goals, student motivation, and evaluation methods. These variables are important in the process of learning how to use language effectively because most EFL learners are more concerned with learning language rules and how to construct grammatical sentences than with producing appropriate sentences for the specific social environment. Izumi (1996) believes that, while it is difficult to learn and teach sociolinguistic competence, students can have assistance in developing and achieving it by becoming more aware of the principles for sociolinguistic language usage outlined by Ellis (1991).

According to Omaggio (2001), there seem to be three purposes why sociolinguistic ability is hardly regarded as a distinct issue and an important component of language training.: a) Due to time restrictions in their curriculum, language teachers frequently believe they do not have time for sociocultural education. b) Teachers may lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach the sociocultural aspects of foreign language learning. c) Dealing with student attitudes is a regular element of teaching sociocultural competency, and it is Socio-linguistic Integration Challenges, Teaching sociolinguistic competence presents unique difficulties for EFL teachers. One major challenge is the lack of authentic cultural exposure in EFL settings. Unlike ESL environments, EFL classrooms often lack natural opportunities for students to interact with native or competent speakers of English (Izumi, 1996). Teachers themselves frequently report insufficient training in sociolinguistic and intercultural pedagogy. According to Omaggio Hadley (2001), many language teachers feel they lack the time, confidence, or materials needed to address sociocultural aspects of language. Additional barriers include rigid curricula, heavy emphasis on standardized testing, and limited access to culturally appropriate teaching resources (Abd Rahman et al., 2022).

Furthermore, cultural differences between teachers' and students' backgrounds can create hesitation in addressing sensitive sociocultural topics. As noted by Kramsch (2014), developing intercultural communicative competence requires teachers to function as cultural mediators, a role many feel underprepared to fulfill. Various approaches have been proposed to develop sociolinguistic competence, including the use of authentic materials, role-plays, simulations, cultural models, and explicit instruction of speech acts (Izumi, 1996; Lazar et al., 2007). However, the gap between theoretical recommendations and actual classroom practices remains wide in many EFL contexts. Recent studies emphasize the need for context-specific materials and ongoing professional development to help teachers effectively integrate sociolinguistic elements into their lessons (Ferguson, 2021; Putra, 2021). Overall, the literature consistently highlights the importance of sociolinguistic competence that is widely acknowledged, its effective teaching continues to be hindered by pedagogical, institutional, and contextual constraints. This study seeks to contribute empirical evidence from the Qatari context to this ongoing discussion.

Learning Needs, Some people argue that for students to succeed in the modern world, they should learn a core set of abilities like how to work together, use computers, think critically, and solve problems. It is essential to know how and what a classroom looks like in the 21st century. Along with this checklist, an essential part of this theory is that the role of the instructor is that of a facilitator or intermediary for learning, not a dispenser of all knowledge. Students are well-informed about classroom expectations and goals, and they treat one another with dignity and respect. They also participate actively in their own education, have their progress monitored, and work together to solve problems. Having instructors who are enthusiastic about fostering 21st-century skills in their students include the ability to work together as a team, think critically, express themselves creatively, and write effectively is essential (Rich,2010). Saomya Saxena, (2013) ranked technology, research methods, problem-solving abilities, and an organised review process as the top ten attributes of an effective classroom. Teachers can now convey their lessons to students without ever having to set foot in a classroom. Neither the instructors nor the students find this interesting or engaging. In a more engaging way, students can access the abundance of information that is readily available to them. During their time in school, students should learn how to seek out information, organise it, comprehend it, and apply it. The capacity to put one's knowledge into practice is an essential skill that will benefit students for the rest of their lives. Even if a student memorizes all the material, it will be useless if they are unable to apply it (Abbott, 2014). To inspire learners to think about their potential and the things they can do in life, it is a teacher's responsibility to provide them with a diverse array of high-quality learning opportunities beginning at an early age. Those students who can keep these abilities up will be well-prepared for whichever career they pursue after high school. Observing a classroom that has included learning methodologies could reveal the instructor leading a mini lesson, moving from small community circles to group circles, or engaging in one-on-one conversations with students. Mostly, students will work in groups to gather information. We give students the opportunity to work easily. A number of researchers have found that brief, focused courses increase participation from students of all ages (Minero, 2017).

Method

Research Design**,** The objective of this study is to examine the communicative competence knowledge of EFL secondary teachers and to ascertain how they apply the idea of socio-intercultural communication in their instructional practices inside the classroom. Additionally, examining the obstacles faced by educators in incorporating sociolinguistic competence in both classroom and real-world contexts. This section outlines the research strategy, describes the study population, and specifies the sampling technique. The study encompasses instruments of data collecting, sources of data, instrument validity, instrument reliability, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques employed. This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences *The Population & The instrument.* The target population included EFL secondary school teachers in Doha, Qatar. Using purposive sampling, eighty-seven teachers from two schools responded to the survey. After data cleaning, seventy valid responses were retained for analysis. Ethical approval was obtained and informed consent secured from all participants. The questionnaire consisted of demographic items and four dimensions with 5-point Likert-scale statements. Pilot testing yielded Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$.

Sources of Data, The primary instrument for data collection is a questionnaire that includes demographic information and four dimensions: (I) teachers' communicative competence knowledge, (II) EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence in the classroom, (III) learning needs, and (IV) EFL teachers' perceived barriers. The questionnaire items derived from existing literature and adapted from various established sources. Each dimension contains five statements. Before the main data collection phase, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a small sample of participants to assess clarity, relevance, and reliability. The pilot study showed acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.76.

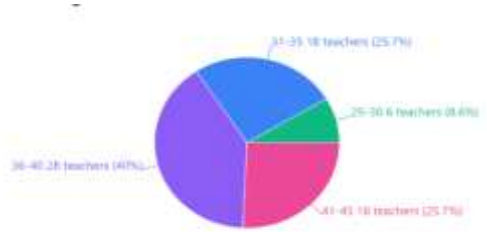
Data Analysis, This study used a quantitative approach to data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teacher's hindrances in fostering learners' communicative competence, with particular emphasis on

sociolinguistic competence and alignment with learning needs. Responses from the structured questionnaire (comprising Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and demographic variables) were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data were entered into SPSS version 27 (or appropriate software). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarise teachers' perceptions of hindrances related to communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence, and learners' needs. Inferential statistical analyses were employed to examine significant relationships and differences among demographic variables. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess mean differences in age across qualification levels (Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD) and across teaching experience groups. All inferential analyses were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to determine statistical significance.

Results

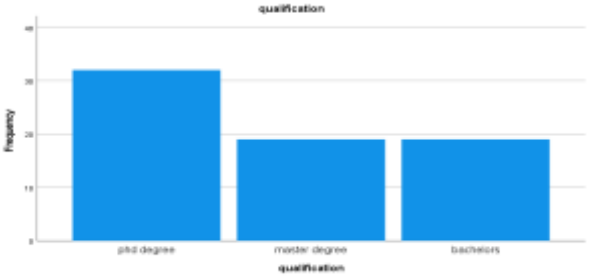
Participants and Demographic Profile, The present study involved 70 EFL teachers recruited from secondary schools in Qatar, comprising both males and females distributed between Ahmed Bin Mohamed Secondary School for Boys and Amnah Bint Wahab Secondary Independent School for Girls. Participants were selected through combination of convenience and purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of instructors actively engaged in EFL teaching at the time of data collection. Regarding age, the distribution shows a clear concentration in the mid-career range. As illustrated in Figure.1, the largest group comprised teachers aged 36–40 years (n = 28; 40.0%), followed by those aged 41–45 years (n = 18. 25.7%) and 31–35 years (n = 17; 24.3%). The youngest category, 25–30 years, was the smallest (n = 7; 10.0%). Overall, 91.4% of the participants were between 31 and 45 years of age, indicating young to mid-career workforce with a modal age in the late 30s (see Fig.1).

Figure 1
EFL Teachers' Age Distribution



The highest educational qualifications of the participants are shown in Figure 2. The sample demonstrated a notably elevated level of academic attainment: thirty-two teachers (45.7%) held a PhD, nineteen teachers (27.1%) held a master's degree, and another nineteen teachers (27.1%) held a bachelor's degree. The substantial proportion of doctoral qualifications suggests that most participants were drawn from secondary-level EFL teaching contexts.

Figure 2
EFL Teachers' Qualifications



Teaching experience is summarized in Figure 2. Experience levels were heavily concentrated in the mid-career range, with exactly half of the participants (n = 35; 50.0%) reporting 11–15 years of EFL teaching experience. This category represents both the modal and median experience level. A further eighteen teachers (25.7%) reported 6–10 years of experience, fourteen teachers (20.0%) reported 16–20 years, and only three teachers (4.3%) reported 21–25 years. No participants had fewer than 6 years of experience or more than 25 years of experience. Using the midpoints of each interval (8, 13, 18, and 23 years), the estimated mean year of experience is approximately 12.9 years. This distribution reflects a homogeneous mid-career sample with limited representation of either novice or very senior educators.

Figure 3
EFL Teaching Experience

In summary, the participant profile describes a mid-career EFL teaching workforce (modal age 36–40 years; modal and median

experience 11–15 years) with exceptionally high academic qualifications (45.7% holding PhDs). This demographic composition is consistent with instructors working in secondary schools in Qatar. These characteristics are directly relevant to the study's objectives, which include examining teachers' self-reported knowledge of communicative competence, beliefs about the teaching of sociolinguistic competence, recognition of contemporary 21st-century learning needs, and perceived hindrances to the effective implementation of communicative language teaching. Contextual framework for interpreting the descriptive data on perceived hindrances, suggesting that teachers' qualifications and career stages may meaningfully influence their experiences and challenges in developing learners' communicative competence (see Tables…).

Table 1
One-Way ANOVA: Age by Qualification Level

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-statistic	p-value
Qualification	(calculated)	2	(calculated)	77.94	3.26×10^{-18}
Within	(calculated)	67	(calculated)	-	-
Total	-	69	-	-	-

Table 2
One-Way ANOVA: Age by Teaching Experience

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-statistic	p-value
Experience	(calculated)	2	(calculated)	222.00	2.76×10^{-30}
Within	(calculated)	67	(calculated)	-	-
Total	-	69	-	-	-

Note. $p < 0.001$

The inferential analysis, conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, revealed highly significant demographic patterns. A one-way ANOVA showed that mean age differs across qualification levels ($F(2, 67) = 77.94$, $p < 0.001$), with PhD holders significantly older than those with master's or bachelor's degrees, reflecting the time required for advanced study. An ANOVA on age by teaching experience groups also produced an extremely significant result ($F(2, 67) \approx 222.00$, $p < 0.001$), confirming a strong positive relationship in which older teachers have more years of experience (see Tables1 and 2). These significant demographic findings provide a crucial contextual framework for interpreting the descriptive data on perceived hindrances, suggesting that teachers' qualifications and career stages may meaningfully influence their experiences and challenges in developing learners' communicative competence.

Teachers' Communicative Competence Knowledge, This section presents the descriptive statistics and interpretation of responses to the five items comprising the first dimension of the questionnaire, which assessed EFL teachers' self-perceived knowledge of communicative competence and related professional practices. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). from 1.073 to 1.137) and lower mean scores (3.63, 3.49, and 3.44, respectively). These items attracted more neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree responses, reflecting greater variability in teachers' access to ongoing professional development, perceptions of colleagues' sociolinguistic knowledge, and personal participation in international seminars or webinars. For example, only 62.9% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with Q1.3 (professional development), while 14.3% disagreed and 22.9% remained neutral.

All five items yielded a median response of 4.00 (Agree), indicating an overall positive tendency across the dimension. The highest levels of agreement were observed for Q1.1 ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.708$) and Q1.2 ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.554$). These items also showed the lowest variability, suggesting strong and consistent self-confidence among participants in both their conceptual understanding of communicative competence and their reported application of it in lesson planning. Specifically, 97.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with Q1.1, and 92.8% did so for Q1.2. In contrast, items Q1.3, Q1.4, and Q1.5 showed greater dispersion (standard deviations ranging.

Figure 4
Teachers' Communicative Competence Knowledge: Level of Agreement

Figure 4 (Teachers' Communicative Competence Knowledge: Level of Agreement) presents a line graph summarizing the

percentages of agreement (Agree + Strongly Agree), disagreement (Strongly Disagree + Disagree), and neutral responses across the five items. The graph shows that agreement levels were highest for Q1.1, Q1.2, and, to a lesser extent, Q1.3, while disagreement and neutral responses were most prominent for Q1.3, Q1.4, and Q1.5. This pattern suggests that, while teachers report strong personal knowledge and application of communicative competence principles, they perceive more limitations in institutional support, collective sociolinguistic awareness among colleagues, and opportunities for external professional development. Overall, the results for this dimension indicate a positive self-evaluation of communicative competence knowledge and classroom application, tempered by moderate uncertainty or dissatisfaction regarding sustained professional development and broader sociolinguistic awareness within the EFL teaching community. These findings provide an important baseline for interpreting subsequent dimensions related to beliefs, learning needs, and perceived hindrances.

EFL Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching Sociolinguistic Competence in the Classroom Responses from EFL teachers regarding their beliefs on teaching sociolinguistic competence in the classroom showed significant differences in both the strength and direction of their beliefs. The lowest levels of agreement were observed for Q2.1 and Q2.2, with means of 2.87 and 2.89 respectively, and medians of 3.00 (Neutral). For both items, disagreement outweighed agreement: 47.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed with Q2.1 and 45.8% with Q2.2, compared with combined agreement rates of only 40.0% and 38.6%. These results indicate that many teachers believe current EFL students have limited awareness of the concept of communicative competence and the sociolinguistic features of English (see Table.3).

Table 3

Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching Sociolinguistic Competence in the Classroom

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strong Agree	Total	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Q2.1 Teachers believe that students in the twenty-first century are aware of the term communicative competency.	11 (15.7%)	22 (31.4%)	9 (12.9%)	21 (30.0%)	7 (10.0%)	70 (100%)	2.87	3	1.28
Q2.2 Teachers believe that ELT students are aware of sociolinguistic features of the English language.	9 (12.9%)	23 (32.9%)	11 (15.7%)	21 (30.0%)	6 (8.6 %)	70 (100%)	2.89	3	1.22
Q2.3 Teachers believe that ELT students are incapable of using language abilities in the real-world situation.	2 (2.9%)	9 (12.9%)	19 (27.1%)	29 (41.4%)	11 (15.7%)	70 (100%)	3.54	4	1
Q2.4 Non- native ELT teachers lack confidence in their abilities to teach socio-cultural aspects of foreign language learning	6 (8.6%)	13 (18.6%)	21 (30.0%)	18 (25.7%)	12 (17.1%)	70 (100%)	3.24	3	1.2
Q2.5 Learners should develop their knowledge related to the target cultures to enhance their communicative competence	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.9%)	9 (12.9%)	31 (44.3%)	27 (38.6%)	70 (100%)	4.16	4	0.86

Responses from EFL teachers regarding the teaching of sociolinguistic competence in the classroom showed significant differences in both the strength and direction of their beliefs. The lowest levels of agreement were observed for Q2.1 and Q2.2, with means of 2.87 and 2.89 respectively, and medians of 3.00 (Neutral). For both items, disagreement outweighed agreement: 47.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed with Q2.1 and 45.8% with Q2.2, compared with combined agreement rates of only 40.0% and 38.6%. These results indicate that many teachers believe current EFL students have limited awareness of the concept of communicative competence and the sociolinguistic features of English. Neutral responses remain relatively stable, fluctuating between 13% and 30%. Figure 5 (Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching Sociolinguistic Competence in the Classroom) presents a line graph summarizing the percentages of agreement (Agree and Strongly Agree), disagreement (Strongly Disagree and Disagree), and neutral responses across the five items. The graph shows that agreement levels were lowest for Q2.1 and Q2.2, moderate for Q2.3 and Q2.4, and highest for Q2.5, while disagreement and neutral responses

were most prominent for Q2.1, Q2.2, and Q2.4. This pattern suggests that teachers hold divided or ambivalent beliefs on certain aspects of teaching sociolinguistic competence – the more contested or complex elements addressed in the earlier items – but demonstrate increasingly strong positive beliefs toward others, with particularly robust consensus on the principle or practice captured in Q2.5.

Figure 5
Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching Sociolinguistic Competence in the Classroom

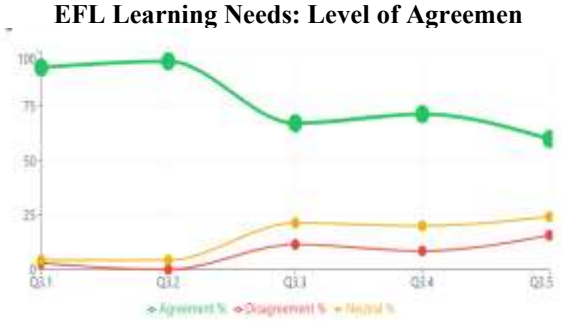
Taken together, the findings regarding EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence in the classroom highlight significant concerns about students' current sociolinguistic awareness and teachers' confidence in addressing socio-cultural content, set against near-unanimous support for integrating target-culture knowledge to enhance communicative competence. The progressive rise in agreement across the items suggests that, while teachers recognise substantial challenges in the current situation, they strongly support culturally informed approaches as a solution. EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence in the classroom. EFL Teachers' Learning Needs, EFL teachers' learning needs elicited the most consistently positive responses in the questionnaire. Items Q3.1 and Q3.2 showed exceptionally high agreement, with means of 4.47 and 4.50 respectively, medians of 5.00 (Strongly Agree), and exceptionally low variability (SD = 0.717 and 0.584). Combined agreement exceeded 92% for both items, with more than half of respondents strongly agreeing. These results reflect a near-unanimous conviction that EFL teachers must understand 21st-century classroom dynamics and that their primary role is to facilitate rather than merely transmit knowledge.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Teachers Learning Needs

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strong Agree	Total	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Q3.1EFL teachers must know what classrooms look like in the 21st century	0	2 (2.9%)	3 (4.3%)	25 (35.7%)	40 (57.1%)	70 (100%)	4.47	5.00	0.7
Q3.2The instructor's role is to facilitate 0 leaming rather than to disseminate all knowledge.	0	0	3 (4.3%)	29 (41.4%)	38 (54.3 %)	70 (100%)	4.50	5.00	0.5
Q3.3Students are well-informed about classroom expectations and goals in their education.	2 (2.9%)	6 (8.6%)	15 (21.4%)	27 (38.6%)	20 (28.6%)	70 (100%)	3.81	4.00	1.0
Q3.4EFL teachers are enthusiastic about fostering 21st-century students' skills like expressing themselves creatively.	1 (1.4%)	5 (7.1%)	14 (20.0%)	29 (41.4%)	21 (30.0%)	70 (100%)	3.91	4.00	0.9
Q3.5Recent English curriculum enriches the engagement and interest for EFL students.	0	11 (15.7%)	17 (24.3%)	29 (41.4%)	13 (18.6%)	70 (100%)	3.63	4.00	0.9

Q3.4 also received strong positive endorsement (M = 3.91, median = 4.00), with 71.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing that teachers are enthusiastic about developing creative expression and other 21st-century skills. Q3.3 was moderately positive (M = 3.81, median = 4.00), with 67.2% agreeing that students are aware of classroom expectations and goals. Q3.5 had the loest mean in the dimension (M = 3.63 median = 4.00) and the highest rate of disagreement (15.7%), although 60.0% of respondents still agreed or strongly agreed that the recent English curriculum enhances student engagement and interest. Figure 6 (Learning Needs: Level of Agreement) presents a line graph showing the percentages of agreement (Agree + Strongly Agree; green line), disagreement (Strongly Disagree + Disagree; red line), and neutral responses (yellow line) across the five items. The graph indicates that agreement starts near 100% for Q3.1 and Q3.2, then gradually declines to just above 60% by Q3.5. Disagreement remains close to 0% initially and rises modestly to approximately 16% at Q3.5, while neutral responses increase from around 5% to approximately 24% over the same period.

Figure 6
EFL Learning Needs: Level of Agreemen



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Overall, the third dimension stands out for its markedly positive orientation compared with the previous dimensions. Teachers show strong consensus on the necessity of adapting to 21st-century pedagogical principles and facilitating learner-centred environments, along with favourable views of teacher enthusiasm and curriculum relevance. The slight decline in agreement towards the end of the dimension suggests some reservation regarding students' preparedness and the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting engagement, yet the prevailing tone remains optimistic. These perceptions of learning needs provide essential context for interpreting the hindrances identified in the final dimension. EFL Teachers' Hindrances, Responses on EFL teachers' perceptions of the main hindrances to effective implementation of communicative and sociolinguistic competence in the classroom consistently indicated substantial perceived barriers, with all items yielding means of at least 3.76 and medians of 4.00 (Agree). The strongest agreement was observed for Q4.5 (M = 4.41, SD = 0.625) and Q4.2 (M = 4.29, SD = 0.819). For Q4.5, 95.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that both teachers and students lack exposure to authentic English use outside the classroom, with disagreement absent (1.4%). Similarly, 85.7% endorsed Q4.2 regarding limited time for developing intercultural materials, with only 4.3% disagreeing. These two items also showed the lowest variability, reflecting broad consensus on their significance as barriers.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for EFL Teachers' Barriers

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strong Agree	Total	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Q3.1EFL teachers must know what classrooms look like in the 21st century	0	2 (2.9%)	3 (4.3%)	25 (35.7%)	40 (57.1%)	70 (100%)	4.47	5.00	0.7
Q3.2The instructor's role is to facilitate 0 leaming rather than to disseminate all knowledge.	0	0	3 (4.3%)	29 (41.4%)	38 (54.3 %)	70 (100%)	4.50	5.00	0.5
Q3.3Students are well-informed about classroom expectations and goals in their education.	2 (2.9%)	6 (8.6%)	15 (21.4%)	27 (38.6%)	20 (28.6%)	70 (100%)	3.81	4.00	1.0
Q3.4EFL teachers are enthusiastic about fostering 21st-century students' skills like expressing themselves creatively.	1 (1.4%)	5 (7.1%)	14 (20.0%)	29 (41.4%)	21 (30.0%)	70 (100%)	3.91	4.00	0.9
Q3.5Recent English curriculum enriches the engagement and interest for EFL students.	0	11 (15.7%)	17 (24.3%)	29 (41.4%)	13 (18.6%)	70 (100%)	3.63	4.00	0.9

Items Q4.3 and Q4.4 occupied an intermediate position, with means of 3.90 and 3.94, respectively. Combined agreement reached 70.0% for Q4.3 (need for professional development in socio-linguistic competence) and 74.2% for Q4.4 (students' difficulty understanding English-speaking cultural norms), though both attracted more neutral responses (21.4% and 18.6%) than the top-rated items. Q4.1 produced the lowest mean (3.76) and the highest variability (SD = 1.148), with 71.4% agreement but also the highest combined disagreement (17.1%) and neutral (11.4%) responses. This suggests that difficulty in integrating socio-linguistic competence directly into classroom practice is perceived as a notable but more context-dependent or divisive hindrance.

Figure 7
EFL Teachers' Challenges: Level of Agreement

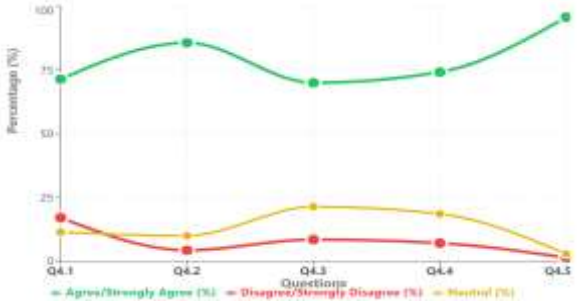

Figure 7 (EFL Teachers' Hindrances: Level of Agreement) presents a line graph showing the percentages of agreement (Agree + Strongly Agree; green line), disagreement (Strongly Disagree + Disagree; red line), and neutral responses (yellow line) across the five items. Agreement levels remain consistently high (71% to 96%), peaking at Q4.2 (86%) and especially at Q4.5 (96%). Disagreement is minimal throughout (below 18%), reaching its lowest points at Q4.2 and Q4.5. Neutral responses fluctuate modestly, peaking at around 21% for Q4.3. Overall, this dimension indicates a strong perception of multiple hindrances to advancing communicative and sociolinguistic competence, particularly limited authentic exposure (Q4.5) and insufficient time for material development (Q4.2). While professional development needs and challenges in student cultural comprehension are also widely acknowledged, direct integration difficulties appear less uniformly endorsed. These findings are consistent with concerns expressed in earlier dimensions – such as limited student awareness and teacher confidence – while highlighting practical and institutional constraints that may hinder progress towards more communicative, culturally informed EFL instruction.

Discussion

This study examined Qatari secondary EFL teachers' knowledge of communicative competence, their beliefs about teaching sociolinguistic competence, their perceived learning needs, and the primary hindrances they face in integrating sociolinguistic competence into classroom instruction. The findings reveal a complex picture characterized by strong theoretical understanding and positive pedagogical orientations, yet constrained by significant practical, institutional, and contextual barriers. Teachers' Knowledge and Application of Communicative Competence, The results demonstrated that participants reported high levels of knowledge regarding communicative competence (M = 4.39) and claimed regular application in lesson planning (M = 4.20). These findings are consistent with established theoretical frameworks that position communicative competence as the cornerstone of modern language teaching (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). The strong confidence expressed by the majority of teachers, particularly those with advanced qualifications (45.7% holding PhDs), suggests that Qatar's teacher education programs are effective in transmitting theoretical knowledge of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. However, comparatively lower scores on items related to ongoing professional development (M = 3.63) and participation in international seminars (M = 3.44) reveal a clear gap between initial knowledge acquisition and continuous professional growth. This discrepancy supports Heng's (2014) argument that although CLT receives strong rhetorical support in policy documents, its effective implementation in EFL contexts is frequently undermined by insufficient sustained teacher training and institutional support.

Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching Sociolinguistic Competence, A significant finding of this study is the teachers' skepticism regarding students' current level of sociolinguistic awareness and their ability to use English appropriately in real-life situations. This perception aligns with Ya's (2008) observation that L2 learners often fail to notice important sociolinguistic and pragmatic differences between their native culture and the target culture. Despite this skepticism, teachers showed strong support for integrating target-culture

knowledge, indicating a general willingness to address intercultural aspects when adequate resources and training are available. This mixed belief pattern reflects a broader tension commonly observed in EFL settings: teachers intellectually recognize the importance of sociolinguistic competence (Kramsch, 2014), yet many feel constrained by practical limitations in developing it effectively. The high proportion of doctoral-qualified participants in the sample may partially explain the nuanced and sophisticated beliefs observed.

Learning Needs and 21st-Century Pedagogy, Teachers expressed strong agreement with modern pedagogical principles, especially the shift from being knowledge transmitters to facilitators of learning (M = 4.50). This indicates that Qatari EFL teachers have internalized 21st-century educational philosophies (Rich, 2010). Nevertheless, the moderate evaluation of the current curriculum's effectiveness in promoting student engagement (M = 3.63) points to a gap between pedagogical ideals and actual classroom realities. This finding echoes Abd Rahman et al. (2022), who emphasized the urgent need for high-quality teaching resources specifically targeting sociolinguistic competence. Barriers to Integrating Sociolinguistic Competency, The most critical barriers identified were limited authentic exposure to English outside the classroom (M = 4.41) and insufficient time for developing culturally relevant materials (M = 4.29). These results strongly corroborate previous international research on CLT implementation challenges in EFL contexts (Ferguson, 2021; Taguchi & De Costa, 2021; Omaggio Hadley, 2001). In Qatar's specific educational environment, where English functions as a foreign language with restricted naturalistic use, the lack of authentic exposure constitutes a particularly structural obstacle. The strong consensus on time constraints further highlights systemic pressures within the Qatari secondary curriculum, where heavy focus on examination preparation and content coverage often leaves little room for sociolinguistic and intercultural activities.

Theoretical Implications, This study makes a valuable contribution by providing empirical evidence from the under-researched Gulf region. It reinforces Canagarajah's (2017) call for situated language use and demonstrates how local educational ecologies shape the implementation of global language teaching approaches. The combination of highly qualified teachers with persistent implementation barriers suggests that individual teacher capacity, while important, is insufficient without corresponding systemic and institutional reforms. The findings also carry international relevance, as the challenges identified mirror those reported across many EFL contexts in Asia and the Middle East. This underscores the necessity for context-sensitive adaptations of CLT rather than direct importation of Western models.

Conclusion

This study investigated Qatari secondary EFL teachers' knowledge of communicative competence, their beliefs regarding the teaching of sociolinguistic competence, and the key hindrances they encounter in classroom implementation. The findings indicate that teachers possess strong theoretical knowledge of communicative competence and demonstrate positive attitudes toward integrating sociolinguistic aspects. Nevertheless, significant practical and institutional barriers particularly limit authentic language exposure and insufficient time for material development continue to impede effective implementation.

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