A case study with Sponge Bob through Sociolinguistics: Improving the English language learning awareness in young learners

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of using the cartoon "SpongeBob SquarePants" to enhance sociolinguistic awareness among young English learners. Recognizing the difficulty in developing metalinguistic skills in young learners, this research uses cartoons to create authentic and engaging sociolinguistic contexts. Participants were provided with language scenarios involving family, friends, and school settings. Data was gathered through one-to-one interviews, focusing on their experiences, awareness of language variations, and its relevance to daily life. The transcribed interviews were analyzed thematically to uncover insights into the participants' sociolinguistic experiences. The study addresses a gap in the literature, as most sociolinguistic research has centered on adults. Findings suggest that young learners' language use is influenced by contextual factors such as setting, gestures, and mimicry. Emotional and demographic factors like sincerity, formal relationships, and age differences also impact language use. The study concludes that integrating sociolinguistic elements into EFL classes can improve linguistic skills, cultural awareness, and social competence. It recommends further research on the long-term effects and integration of sociolinguistic education in curricula.

Introduction

As an interdisciplinary field, sociolinguistics bridges the gap between language use and societal influences, emphasizing how culture and social structures shape communication. From a broader perspective, sociolinguistics explains how language varies across geographical borders and social contexts, examining the interactions among speakers and the appropriateness of their language choices in relation to such factors as etiquette, interpersonal relations and regional dialects (Bayyurt, 2013). Recognized as a distinct field since the 1960s with Labov's work, sociolinguistics has begun to make its presence felt in foreign language teaching, particularly through Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence. According to this concept, language is not merely a system of rules, but a social practice influenced by cultural, contextual, and interpersonal factors. In this sense, it can be argued that communicative competence involves not only the ability to form correct sentences but also to choose appropriate language for the cultural and situational context which enables learners to communicate effectively in

diverse settings. This focus on the role of context in communication highlights the significance of pragmatics and stresses the necessity for learners to acquire both linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies. Within this framework, we can expand our understanding of sociolinguistic competence through Canale and Swain's explanations (1980). Accordingly, sociolinguistic competence is related to the knowledge about how language is used across different social and cultural contexts. It deals with the factors such as the use of context-appropriate vocabulary, grammatical structures and intonations. Moreover, it involves the ability to interpret and produce language which is appropriate for different interactions based on the roles of participants, the setting and the purpose of communication.

In the context of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) or Second Language Teaching (SLT), sociolinguistic competence is essential for equipping learners with the skills to communicate effectively in real-world situations. While adults are more aware of it, raising sociolinguistic awareness in young learners has been significant to assist them in becoming efficient users in the future. Through the appropriate and level-friendly materials, this awareness can be enhanced. Furthermore, cartoons aid in facilitating the language and sociolinguistic items authentically. With the collaboration of the cartoons, the lesson plans could involve videos or games for the topics to be taught in the classes as part of the spatial-visual skills. Indeed, the lessons should also be eye-catching for the young learners in addition to having a specific aim for the class. However, these entertaining activities are expected to include a meaningful context to gain the language skills with the inductive way of teaching the language rules besides the entertaining content (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Cheung et al. (2010) argued in the study that sociolinguistic competence could have an influence on the acquisition of the second language in a various way. Similarly, according to a study by Mede & Dikilitaş (2015), it is discussed that in the light of the findings in Türkiye EFL context, the integration of sociolinguistic skills into the curriculum of the young learners could assist the learning process of the young learners and the teaching process of the trainers. Additionally, it is observed that the kids who are exposed to the different idiolects could raise awareness on the language used, which results in being more delighted with their own accents (Teach Better Team, 2021).

By applying sociolinguistic principles to language instruction, as given above, educators may assist learners in developing a deeper understanding of how language functions within diverse social and cultural contexts (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1991; Useini, 2017; Yu, 2006). As a result of this evolving sociolinguistic approach to language teaching, modern language learning pedagogies have started to gain prominence. In contrast to the traditional language teaching approaches focusing on grammar and language structure, these pedagogies emphasize the contextual use of language and the development of various literacies necessary for effective communication. Considering these perspectives, this study aims to scrutinize the efficacy of cartoons by raising sociolinguistic awareness in young learners and focusing on different language contexts in their classes. Consequently, this study is expected to explore the in-depth analysis on the following topics:

1. What are the sociolinguistic implications of teaching to the young learners?

2. How do the cartoons impact the sociolinguistic competence of the young learners?

3. How do the young learners perceive the relationship of the society and the language changes in the context of the cartoons?

To finalize, in the next section consisting of the literature review of the study, exploring the impact of cartoons on sociolinguistic competence development, integrating sociolinguistic skills into the lesson plans for young language learners and understanding language variation and social contexts in young language learners will be discussed.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation of Sociolinguistics Teaching

Sociolinguistics, which examines language use within social and cultural contexts, collaborates with various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and education. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the field embraces diverse definitions and perspectives. Spolsky (2003), for example, defines sociolinguistics as the study of the connections between language and society, including the interactions between language use and social structures that influence speakers' lives. Expanding upon this, sociolinguistics could also be described as the area exploring how language variations are shaped by factors such as age, gender or social status (Nazlı, 2016). In addition to its broad theoretical scope, sociolinguistics also offers insights into language education. Bayyurt (2023) describes foreign language education as a field enriched by social interactions, covering aspects from language acquisition and teaching strategies to the impact of technology and the dynamics of school experiences, especially teacher-student interactions. She argues that adopting sociolinguistic approaches in educational settings has the potential to substantially improve the methods used in foreign language instruction.

This comprehensive understanding of sociolinguistics' role in language education is further supported by Canale and Swain (1980), who argue that sociolinguistic approaches provide essential contextual structures and materials to enhance language acquisition process. Agreeing with these findings, many researchers described how sociolinguistics could enhance the learning process of the learners. Hymes (1972) and Savignon (1991) claimed that despite the frequent neglect of social contexts in language lesson programs, sociolinguistics might be influential to acquire the language interactively. Additionally, the use of sociolinguistics in language classes could be regarded as a cross-cultural activity that can improve learners' understanding of the target culture (Al-Jarf, 2006; Yu, 2006). Although many studies have focused on the effectiveness of sociolinguistics in adult education, Cheung et al. (2010) argued in the study that sociolinguistic competence could have an influence on the acquisition of the second language in various ways. Nazlı (2023) further suggests that the sociolinguistic awareness can be improved by exposing learners to diverse cultures, real-life contexts and different language accents, enhancing their overall language competence.

In addition to the advantages of integrating sociolinguistics into language classes, historical and contemporary studies have identified several challenges. One significant challenge concerns the ability to effectively raise awareness about situational and contextual language variations. Holmes & Brown (1976) argued that the professional development of teachers might not be sufficient for fostering sociolinguistic growth among learners. This is often due to classrooms lacking the necessary materials and tools for this specific purpose.

Furthermore, Canale and Swain (1980) noted that the complexity of sociolinguistic contexts and tasks requires further study to determine their practical applicability in general language education, despite the adoption of the communicative language teaching approach (CLT). Keeping these challenges in mind, Omaggio (1993) reports that teachers often feel inadequate to teach sociolinguistic competencies and are required to follow a curriculum that does not include these competencies. Additionally, it is highlighted that teachers encounter significant difficulties in measuring and assessing sociolinguistic competencies, which may result from potential deficiencies in their training and the lack of appropriate assessment tools.

Considering the discussions presented, this study proposes that classrooms using interactive sociolinguistic elements could markedly improve the language learning process. By applying sociolinguistic principles effectively, educators could make language instruction not only more engaging but also more applicable to real-world interactions, thereby better preparing students for the diverse communication demands of a global society.

Sociolinguistic Skills in Young Learners

Kachru (1990) introduced the concept of World Englishes (WE), challenging the traditional notion of following a standard form of English by recognizing the existence of multiple Englishes globally. Therefore, guided by this understanding, the users of English as a lingua franca now aim to become more intelligible and competent, moving away from traditional, standardized teaching methods toward more dynamic and inclusive approaches (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022). Hence, this shift also switches the manner of teaching to young learners thanks to the cooperation of diverse cultures and numerous online resources in EFL or ESL classes. Moreover, although young learners are often considered to be cognitively less developed than adults (Useini, 2017), employing inductive methods for teaching sociolinguistics can significantly enhance their proficiency in English and make them more effective users of English in the future.

Following these changes, several studies have focused on sociolinguistic competence in the language learning process. Understanding the connection between language, culture and society can enhance the teaching of EFL and ESL. Typically, sociolinguistic awareness has been encouraged primarily among adults in classrooms. O'Shannessy (2013) found that integrating sociolinguistics into lessons could make the learning process more enjoyable for young learners by providing a comprehensive view of communities. By teaching sociolinguistics inductively, young learners can enhance their cross-cultural knowledge and motivation (DeStefano, 1971; Mizne, 1997). Through the inductive teaching, the learners could acquire the knowledge by experiencing, observing and creating connections between the elements learnt (Prince & Felder, 2006). Additionally, learning through experiences in a positively interactive and collaborative environment can improve peer learning in sociolinguistic-based lessons (Henderson, 2016; Useini, 2017).

In addition to direct sociolinguistic studies, there are also studies linking sociolinguistics with communicative competence. For instance, Legak and Wahi (2020) found that tasks related to communicative competence increased learner's interest in language learning and fostered intrinsic motivation, leading them to become independent learners, using their sociolinguistic knowledge in both formal and informal contexts. Supporting these findings, another study by

Hartinah (2020) argued that developing communicative competence in young learners can enhance their empathy and ability to deal with social situations in different languages.

Despite the benefits of integrating sociolinguistics into young learners' EFL / ESL classes, there are also studies highlighting the challenges. As learners are mostly exposed to vocabulary and grammar-based teaching, sociolinguistic-based classes may not be prioritized (Lopez, 2015). Similarly, Guiral (2022) noted that learners might not be as active in communicative competence-enhancing classes as in other lessons, potentially due to fatigue from learning other aspects of the language. Additionally, Paquette-Smith et al. (2022) found that young learners might not appreciate every accent in a class, preferring those that are locally familiar and considering the gender of the teachers.

To conclude, while integrating sociolinguistics into language education for young learners presents notable benefits, such as enhancing communicative competence and cross-cultural understanding, it also faces significant challenges. Some studies suggest that young learners may struggle to fully grasp sociolinguistic features due to the lack of motivation and a curriculum heavily focused on vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that contextual language classes integrating interactive sociolinguistic elements could improve the language acquisition process, making it more engaging and applicable to real-world interactions.

Cartoons and Sociolinguistics in Young Learners' Classes

Current approaches in ELT emphasize the need for educators to adapt to modern conditions and integrate new resources alongside traditional teaching methods and techniques. Researchers are now concerned with the collaboration of sociolinguistics and the integration of technology. For instance, Savignon (2017) discusses that sociolinguistic awareness can be enhanced through the collaboration between teachers and the use of technological tools, which can highlight a wide range of contextual differences in languages.

Focusing on young learners and the indirect teaching of sociolinguistic concepts, Internet resources such as videos, cartoons or visuals have become significant. Many researchers have examined the effectiveness of cartoons and contextual videos. According to Prosic-Santovac (2017), cartoons can motivate young learners by exposing them to authentic language and helping them learn vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency.

Moreover, internet resources can enable young learners to become autonomous learners through student-centred classes facilitated by influential online trainers (Lola, 2023). Agreeing with this finding, Arıkan & Taraf (2010) and Ibda et. al (2023) found that cartoons provided via the internet can enhance young learners' concentration due to their engaging visual content. Due to the cognitive and developmental differences between young learners and adults (Turgunbeyeva & Valijanava, 2023), teachers can effectively increase sociolinguistic awareness and the use of internet-based videos, cartoons and visual materials.

However, there are challenges to integrating videos and cartoons into EFL or ESL classes. Bekleyen (2016) noted that while videos can enhance the kinesthetic learning abilities of young learners, teachers should be mindful of the video duration, content, and security to ensure they are appropriate for the learners' developmental levels. Pelani (2016) suggested that animated materials should create a positive classroom atmosphere without causing anxiety.

Additionally, Taghizadeh and Hasani Yourdshahi (2020) emphasized the importance of teachers' skills in integrating technological tools into language classes, as young learners may not be fully competent in using these tools within educational programs.

In summary, previous studies have primarily focused on the use of videos and cartoons in EFL or ESL classes as a new technique to motivate learners by providing an authentic display of language. These studies highlight the potential of using cartoons to integrate sociolinguistics into young learners' classes in an inductive, cognitive, and awareness-raising manner. However, it is crucial to remember that while cartoons and videos can be valuable tools to enhance learners' sociolinguistic awareness, teachers must use them carefully as tools rather than the primary focus of the lessons, considering the duration and content of the materials.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The participants were asked to voluntarily contribute to this study. The ethical considerations of the research were significant since the participants were underaged. Therefore, the researchers held individual meetings with each participant's parents to obtain verbal and written consent. Parents were informed that their children's experiences and sociolinguistic awareness would be used as data. The first researcher was the sole observer throughout the study to ensure that the students felt comfortable and secure, as they were already familiar with her.

In this study, the participants were asked to participate in the SpongeBob Square Pants-based class and fulfill the tasks in the lesson consisting of pre, while and post activities. These activities focused on vocabulary from the cartoon scenes and integrated basic grammar and chunk structures previously taught in their English classes. Additionally, the researchers paid special attention to integrating structures familiar to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders.

After the themed lesson, each participant took part in a one-to-one interview with the researcher, answering 7 open-ended questions verbally. These questions were designed to explore their general experiences and sociolinguistic awareness in the classroom. So that the participants could reflect on their gains flexibly, follow-up questions were asked to delve into their thoughts and opinions. Interview durations changed between 7 minutes and 17 minutes.

Design of the Study

This study is exploratory research as it focuses on the potential impacts of using animations to enhance learner's sociolinguistic awareness. The research is designed to address the complexity of the sociolinguistic phenomena through a qualitative approach, utilizing voice recordings, their transcriptions and thematic analysis.

The target population consisted of 5 primary school students enrolled in a private educational center with a focus on new generation teaching methods. These learners, who were non-native English speakers, attended English classes twice a week taught by the first researcher. In this study, two sampling methods were used: Convenience Sampling and Quota Sampling. Convenience sampling was chosen because these learners were readily accessible to the researcher, making it easier to conduct the study. Quota Sampling was employed to ensure that the selected sample represented the specific characteristics of the population, such as being primary school students and non-native English speakers.

Step	Participant	Grade	Gender
1	P1	the 4th grader	Male
2	P2	the 3rd grader	Male
3	P3	the 2nd grader	Female
4	P4	the 3rd grader	Male
5	P5	the 3rd grader	Female

Data collection and analysis

The present research is qualitative in nature, as it focuses on a deep description of the participants' experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). These experiences were articulated based on interview questions asked in the learners' mother tongue, designed to elicit their sociolinguistic experiences through the lesson and its content. The interview questions were as follows:

1. What was your favorite activity in class? Why?
2. We talked about the culture of the language (with family, friends and teacher), do you think we could see language differences in SpongeBob?
3. Are language differences important in our daily life? How do they matter?
4. Thinking about your own environment, how many types of languages do you use (family, friends, school languages, etc.)?
5. What have you gained from this lesson?
6. What would you change about this lesson?
7. Which SpongeBob language did you like? Why do you like it?

After collecting the voice-recordings and related data, the recordings were transcribed using Speechmatics, an AI-powered free online platform capable of transcribing nearly any language. Following the transcription, the data were examined through thematic analysis. This method was chosen to capture the participants' deep experiences, reflections, and sociolinguistic awareness. The common themes were identified and discussed in the findings section of the actual research. Thematic analysis was conducted collaboratively, with both researchers independently analyzing and creating themes to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. Additionally, the final set of themes was reviewed by another specialist to confirm their appropriateness and coherence with the study's objectives.

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of sociolinguistics in EFL classes of young learners through the use of cartoons. Data was collected through one-to-one interviews with the participants to capture their experiences and perspectives on this field. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which resulted in the identification of two main themes. In this section, these themes and the sub-themes derived from the in-depth analysis will be presented.

Contextual Influences on Language Use

The first major theme identified in the study was the impact of context on language use. Participants indicated that language changes according to the various contexts present in communication or speech. These contexts were described in terms of place, environment and non-verbal language in SpongeBob SquarePants. Under this main theme, participants discussed the following sub-themes to highlight the differences that occur with varying contexts.

Language according to the Place

Interview results revealed that participants believed that the size and type of place influence the language used by speakers. They noted that in smaller settings, such as private courses, speakers tend to use a more casual tone. One participant summarized their experience as follows:

> "This course is a flat in an apartment, so it is small. I use a daily language with the teachers here, but I use a more formal language in my school because it is bigger than this course." (P2)

Non-verbal Communication

Another key aspect of this theme was the sole of non-verbal communication. Participants claim that language is not solely structured by word; gestures and facial expressions (mimicry) also play a crucial role. Some participants discussed that the non-verbal communication can serve as a primary mode of interaction, although it might not always be appropriate in all contexts.

> I am currently reading a book called "Out of My Mind." In the book, there's a little girl who has a very severe illness. She can't speak, walk, or write. She can't do anything at all. It's such a condition, you know. But despite that, her mother loves her. Look, she can't speak or do anything, but despite that, her mother loves her. This is similar to that. (P1)

> SpongeBob used funny and humiliating gestures and mimicry in the classroom, although he did not talk, while the teacher was teaching. I think he could have been much kinder in the classroom. (P4)

Emotional and Demographic Dynamics in Communication

The second major theme identified in the study was the influence of emotional connections and demographic factors on language use. Participants claimed that the emotional connection with the subjects of an interaction could impact the language used, as it could be influenced by varying levels of love, respect and sincerity.

Emotional and Demographic Dynamics in Communication

One of the sub-themes under this theme highlighted the effect of relationships on the language used in speech. Participants commonly mentioned that their interactions with family members, friends and teachers shaped their language choices. Some of the participants shared their experiences as follows:

> For example, when I talk to my mother, I behave more seriously, but if my friend comes, I am much more friendly, but I am never like this with my mother. I speak more seriously to my mother and father. I use a more serious tone. (P1)

At school, either their closest 5 friends or a family member will influence their future and the language used. (P2)

I talk to my mum and my teacher in a kinder way, but the mum is my mother, and the teacher is my teacher, so the language is different but polite in both. (P4)

My mother knows all my private things. I can talk to her privately and in a comfortable way. She can know them. It's not a problem because she is our mother. (P5)

Mutual Understanding

Although many participants noted that the level of respect and love generally influenced language positively, they also pointed out that a lack of mutual understanding, due to language barriers or dominance by one party, could negatively impact communication. Two of the participants summarized their experiences as follows:

I don't know Kurdish. My father, mother, grandmothers, in other words, my whole family, know Kurdish, but I don't, and my sibling doesn't, either. I have a female cousin who is one year older than me, and she knows a little bit. Because I am emotional, words affect me a lot, the lack of Kurdish affects me very deeply. (P2)

For example, if we speak badly to someone, they won't respect us. If we always treat someone badly, they will treat us badly in return. (P3).

Mutual Understanding

Another finding from the interview was that age differences could define the language used in interactions. Participants noted that they adjusted their tone based on the age of the person they were speaking to, often showing more seriousness with older individuals and more casual tone with younger ones. Some participants shared their insights:

Both out of respect and because of love. We respect the elders. One of the rules of love is to be respectful to the older person. (P1)

I am young, but when I talk to a baby, I speak with a sweet tone of voice, perhaps even sweeter, with a baby talk because s/he is younger than me. (P4)

In summary, the participants discussed that the language they use in their daily lives is influenced by various factors, including the size of the place, the level of sincerity, respect or love, mutual understanding and age differences. These discussions reflect their real-life contexts and are exemplified by the animated scenarios presented in the sample cartoon.

Discussion

The present study focused on the experiences of young EFL learners through the integration of sociolinguistics using a popular cartoon among kids to raise awareness on this field. As mentioned in the results, two major themes emerged from the research: contextual influences on language use and emotional and demographic dynamics in communication. The in- depth analysis of the interviews revealed that the language used by young learners varies based on the place and the use of non- verbal expressions such as gestures and mimicry. Furthermore, it was

found that mutual understanding between communicators and their age can significantly influence the tone of the language used.

The results suggested that the size of the place influences the language used, with speakers tending to use more informal and sincere language in smaller spaces and more formal language in larger ones. Although there are no direct studies on how the size of places affects speech, Garrett (2001) indicated that certain places can enhance interpersonal communication, which can, in turn, affect language use. This corresponds with Fishman's (1972) concept of domains, which describes how language choice is shaped by institutional contexts and their associated interactions. Domains attempt to summarize the major clusters of interactions that occur in specific settings with specific interlocutors, emphasizing the significance of context in language use. Holmes (2013) further elaborates that domains involve typical interactions between participants in a typical setting, drawing on social factors such as participants, setting and topic to make generalizations about speech communities. Thus, it can be inferred from the present study that both physical environment and interpersonal relationships can shape language use. This finding is also consistent with Spolsky (2003), who suggested that language is influenced by social structures such as communities or places where it is used. Additionally, studies by Johnstone (2016) and Amin (2020) indicated that the locality or use of language can affect the social identity of its users. For instance, the lack of a common language within a family can lead to negative emotions and reduced confidence in communication.

While the primary focus was on contextual influences, some participants emphasized that learning new words and structures through sociolinguistically integrated tools such as cartoons, animated games or videos enhances language acquisition. This observation is consistent with previous research, which suggests that using diverse materials and tools can make language learning more interactive and engaging (Bayyurt, 2013; Cheung et al., 2010; Hymes, 1972; O'Shannessy, 2013; Savignon, 1991). The integration of sociolinguistics in language classes, particularly through the use of cartoons and animated videos, was found to be more engaging and effective. This finding is supported by Henderson's (2016) research, which indicates that such classes for young learners can improve both academic success and attitudes towards the target language by providing cultural context.

The study also demonstrated that the focus of EFL classes is often on receptive skills such as reading and sub-skills like vocabulary and grammar. Integrating cartoons or animated materials can create a more collaborative and independent learning environment, even in one-to-one private lessons where the only interaction is between the tutor and the learner. This finding supports Legak and Wahi (2020) and Hartinah (2020), who suggested that communicative competence can increase learner independence, fostering sociolinguistic awareness. Similarly, Lola (2023) noted that media-based materials can enhance autonomous sociolinguistic learning in classes.

In addition to these findings, the age gap between speakers was also identified as a significant factor influencing language use. Participants noted that they adjust their tone based on the age of the person they are speaking to. This finding is consistent with Wagner (2012), who indicated age-related language shifts can create social awareness in daily language use. Moreover, Nazlı (2023) concluded that language can be adjusted based on age dynamics, leading to respect and contextual appropriateness. Furthermore, studies have also shown that

the language used can introduce fresh and unique expressions into the conversation to better comprehend the discourse Kress, 1983; Van Leeuwen, 2016). Hence, the diversity in conversation and discourse displayed by various speakers can lead to variations in the social identity reflected in speech (Gee, 2005).

The integration of sociolinguistics into EFL classes through cartoons has demonstrated benefits; however, challenges may arise when the material surpasses the learners' proficiency level. Some participants mentioned that the level of the SpongeBob SquarePants was slightly higher than their current level, creating difficulties in fully grasping the sociolinguistic elements. In this context, Bekleyen (2016) stressed the significance of selecting educational materials, such as videos, based on the learners' proficiency levels to facilitate effective learning. Following this, for sustainable outcomes in integrating sociolinguistics into EFL classes, Solmaz (2023) and Yeşilbursa (2023) emphasized the importance of integrating multicultural elements while considering language, location, and community dynamics. Additionally, cartoons are said to benefit EFL classes by enhancing the learning of sociolinguistic patterns. Karakaş (2023) further argues that materials such as games and online resources could increase learners' motivation by raising awareness of linguistic diversity.

To summarize, despite the limited research, especially in Türkiye, on the integration of sociolinguistics in educational settings, incorporating these elements into language classes for young learners can significantly enhance the learning experience. The present study concluded that integrating sociolinguistics into young learners' EFL classes helps them understand the relationship between language and different contexts, age, and mutual understanding in interactions. It was also inferred that lessons should be tailored to the learners' proficiency levels, utilizing materials that enhance sociolinguistic skills to help students internalize the contextualization of the target language and be aware of the nuances in their own language.

Limitations

This study aimed to explore the role of sociolinguistic awareness and enhancement in young learners' EFL classes through the integration of a cartoon, SpongeBob SquarePants. The researchers focused on the qualitative experiences of the participants, specifically 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders. While the results highlight the benefits of integrating sociolinguistics into young learners' EFL classes, several challenges and limitations were identified that should be considered for future research.

Firstly, this study is conducted with a popular cartoon for the kids, SpongeBob SquarePants. The researchers were constrained in selecting alternative cartoons or animated materials that might better display sociolinguistic patterns in the target language culture, as the participants are underaged. Although the goal was to raise awareness of sociolinguistic elements in English, not all scenes from the selected episode were included in classroom practice due to the presence of inappropriate language for young learners. Consequently, the scene selection was limited, which may have affected the thorough representation of sociolinguistic features.

Secondly, the participants were private students of one of the researchers and they were part of a five-week training program. They experienced a purely sociolinguistic-enhanced class for 80 minutes within their enrolled program. Therefore, the study does not present long-term

results of such implementations. Future studies are recommended to adopt a longitudinal approach to provide more conclusive evidence on the long term-effects of sociolinguistic integration in young learners' classes.

In essence, the limited selection of the scenes from the cartoon and the short duration of the study are significant restrictions. For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct higher-level students who are not underaged, allowing for the use of less restricted materials over an extended period to examine various aspects in different research designs.

Conclusion

This case study explored the experiences of young EFL learners in a sociolinguistics- based class enhanced with cartoons or the animated materials. Through interviews with the participants, it was found that the language use among young learners is influenced by various contextual factors, such as the setting in which language is used, and the use of gestures and mimicry. The study revealed that emotional and demographic factors, including sincerity, formal relationships, mutual understanding, and age differences, significantly impact language use. These findings are consistent with previous research, indicating that language can be contextually adapted based on social structures, mutual understanding, and levels of sincerity and respect among speakers.

Additionally, the study suggests that changes in language use due to contextual, emotional, and demographic factors can foster social awareness and respect in communication from the perspective of young learners. Integrating sociolinguistics into EFL classes not only enhances linguistic skills but also cultural awareness and social competence. While young learners benefit from sociolinguistic elements in EFL classes, it is crucial for teachers to carefully select visual materials that are age-appropriate, developmentally suitable, and suitable for the course objectives. For long-term effectiveness, educational content complexity should match learners' levels, and the use of sociolinguistics should be expanded in diverse cultural contexts.

For future research, the focus should be on the long-term outcomes, benefits, and challenges of sociolinguistics-based classes for young learners. Longitudinal studies can provide a deeper understanding of how sociolinguistic awareness develops over time and its lasting impact on language proficiency and social skills. Additionally, integrating sociolinguistics into the official curriculum and lesson plans of EFL classes is suggested, ensuring that materials and activities are suitable for the learners' age and proficiency levels. Teacher training programs should include strategies for selecting appropriate materials and designing activities that promote sociolinguistic competence. Moreover, expanding the use of sociolinguistics in diverse cultural contexts can enhance learners' global awareness and sensitivity to different social and cultural norms. This approach can prepare students for real-world communication in a multicultural environment.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of integrating sociolinguistics into young learners' EFL classes. Using engaging materials like cartoons and animated videos, educators can develop an interactive and contextually rich learning atmosphere that promotes both linguistic and cultural competence. The findings highlight the need for careful selection of educational content to match learners' proficiency levels and developmental stages. As future

research continues to explore this field, the integration of sociolinguistics into language education can pave the way for more effective and inclusive teaching practices, ultimately preparing students for successful communication in a diverse and globalized world.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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