

Investigating Indian ESL learners' silent behaviour in response to oral tasks in online and offline classes

Suvarna Lakshmi Gangavarapu a,1,*, Udaya Mutyala b,2, Ramamuni Reddy Chada b,3

- ^{a, b, c} The English and Foreign Languages University, Tarnaka, Hyderabad 500007, India
- ¹ suvarnalakshmi@efluniversity.ac.in *; ² udaya@efluniversity.ac.in ; ³ ramamuni@efluniversity.ac.in
- * Corresponding author



ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 4 July 2022 Revised 6 July 2022 Accepted 6 July 2022

Keywords

Learner silence Online and offline learning Teacher's questions Interaction

ABSTRACT

As teachers and researchers, we are intrigued by learner silence and wonder how to understand silence in the classroom, particularly when silence prevails as we request a response to an oral task. In Indian ESL contexts, reasons for learner silence are less investigated as it is considered juxtaposed to classroom interaction. This study explored reasons for undergraduate-level learner silence in online and offline language classrooms in relation to teacher questioning. It further tried to surface the reasons for learners' silent behaviour. Though the nature of the study is qualitative, as the data collected is from 125 students, it is quantified. The implications of the study suggest that online and offline teachers focus on the quality of speaking tasks in the classroom with a better understanding of learners' silent behaviour and prudent planning of classroom interaction activities resulting in effective learning.



This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license.



How to Cite: Gangavarapu, S., K., Mutyala, U., and Chada, R., R., (2022). Investigating Indian ESL learners' silent behaviour in response to oral tasks in online and offline classes. Journal of Silence Studies in Education, 1(2), 46-56. https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v1i2.24

1. Learner Silence in Classroom

Silence in language classrooms has received wide attention in the past few decades. It seems to be dynamic in its purpose of existence and the impact it has on language learning. Before the 1970s, prior to realising and agreeing that the purpose of language existence is communication, silence was perceived to be insignificantly ubiquitous in all learning contexts. Silence, particularly in the traditional Indian context is perceived as *good behaviour* which is being encouraged in the classrooms. With the onset of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) and the major focus on language teaching theories and praxis, the silence started taking a back seat in the process of language learning. Thereafter, silence in the classroom is interpreted in several ways.

One such interpretation of silence among ESL learners is to view it as an indication of nonparticipation and hindrance to learning (Tsou, 2005). Research also shows that silence had multiple meanings and served different purposes in SLL contexts (Bao, 2014). Silence in the teaching and learning context is largely evaluated in terms of classroom participation. Teachers encourage their learners to participate orally in classroom discussions and they also assign daily participation grades (Howard & Henney 1998). The decision to speak in class discussion varies from learner to learner and even from class to class (Meyer 2007). The case of silence in the classroom varies in both the school and college settings depending on the age and cognitive maturity to understand the purpose of oral interaction in the classroom. Jaworski (2005) says that silence in the institutional setting was neglected for several years. Most of the studies on silence focus on English language teaching, basically related to English as second language learners by exploring linguistic patterns and language proficiency.





In another study, silence has been interpreted as guilt in a criminal justice context (Cotterill 2005). As traditions across the world continue to denote silence with different intended meanings, these may relate a silent individual to the one who is powerless, ignorant, shy, or incapable of articulating to the ones such as the wise, thinking, and powerful (Bao 2021). The way we view, understand, and operate with silence in various situations are determined by the culture that we are part of. For instance, a learner from Japanese culture would believe strongly that his silence means well behaved whereas this may be equated to being rude and non-social by somebody from a western upbringing. However, the classroom contexts pursue it very differently resulting in criticizing the instructor for silence in the classroom. It is imperative thus for an ESL/EFL teacher to be cognizant of the silent behaviour of learners considering their respective backgrounds.

For many Asian learners, language classrooms often pose challenges in many forms. The concerning questions that bother the learners include whether one should take part in the classroom discussions despite the grammatical flaws in their speech; if they still attempt to speak, would it be viewed as interference by the class teacher? Even if the teacher is encouraging, will it deter opportunities for their peers, or would they be making a mockery of themselves by exposing their language inadequacies in the classrooms? Amidst these and many more questions tend to develop self-doubt and become conscious of every action resulting only in further anxiety. Though there is enough literature that suggests silence as a facilitative act in the process of learning, Maher's (2021) study shows how learner-centered reflections prove it otherwise and the results establish that silence is a consequence of self-doubt. Increased self-doubt and silence promote anxiety among learners in language classes. Therefore, understanding the reasons for these behaviours through learners' reflections enriches teachers' understanding of classroom needs as well. Another study with a more diverse international sample from countries such as Indonesia, Philippines and Australia highlights the need for teachers' awareness of the relationship between task choice and its impact on the learners' silence and classroom talk. As Bao and Ye (2020) suggest, learners' thinking time or rehearsing time cannot be undermined as a non-constructive phase, rather, should be viewed as an individual's approach toward L2 learning. While there may be other micro or macro factors ranging from individual differences to larger cultural ones, teachers as the classroom facilitators ought to help learners with appropriate instructions while executing speaking tasks in their language sessions.

According to Bates (2015), social constructivist approaches to learning emphasize that interaction is a fundamental requirement for the development of the community, creating meaning, and promoting learning. Beaudoin (2002) says silence from learners sometimes can be distressing, and the underlying reasons for silence may be difficult for teachers to interpret. When silence occurs online, members of the learning community may be left to wonder whether the silence is indicative of agreement, disinterest, absence, uncertainty, or alienation (Gradinaru, 2016; Xin & Feenberg, 2006), reasons that indicate the non-learning presence in the virtual class. Teng (2009) states that college students' inclass silence can be seen as a form of psychological state and manner of them in the level of thought, emotion and action. He stresses that silence refers only to the absence of talk, but not the absence of thought because it just denotes limited engagement or inadequate involvement in classroom communication which is a positive interpretation of silence behind the screen when attending classes in online mode.

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for silence in the classroom is linked to culture. Research on classroom participation orally considered learners' cultural backgrounds and personality traits as major factors adding to learner silence (Lui, 2005; Nakane, 2005). Tsui (1996) named several factors causing learner-reticence, which include learners' failure to comprehend teacher talk, not being given enough time by the teacher to digest information, and learners' fear of making mistakes and losing 'face'. Moreover, elements such as learners' target language competence, previous speaking performance in class, confidence level, and lesson contents are all potential reasons contributing to learners' tendency to be silent in language classrooms (Liu & Jackson, 2009; Delima, 2012). Though a couple of studies (E.g.: Singh, 2021; Verma, 2017) claim to be focusing on silence in Indian ESL contexts, they have failed to explore and offer valid reasons for its existence in the classroom.

The literature reviewed above pertaining to the domain of learner silence and language education attempted to examine the causes of learner silence when instructed to respond to oral tasks in L2 classrooms. In line with this argument, the present study examines how learner silence during the tasks is to be understood in relation to oral tasks. We also attempted to understand learner behaviour in conventional and virtual classroom conditions. This study thus forms a continuum to the existing

knowledge in the field of language education and contributes to the awareness-raising in teacher communities.

2. Methodology of the Study

This section presents the details of the methodology adopted for the study starting with the rationale of the study, the aim and objectives of the study and the methodology adopted to collect data.

2.1 Background of the Study

It is evident from the above literature review that there is not much work done on learner silence or silent behaviour of learners in the classroom in the Indian ESL context. The probable reasons could be:

Silence is an indication of good behavior in the process of learning (in general, language learning not being an exception), traditionally and culturally, silence (in the form of meditation) was given more importance over talk. So, how to change silent behaviour became the focus of the language teaching-learning research rather than understanding learner silence. Silence is more of a psychological (cognitive or personality) related issue rather than a concern for language teachers.

This resulted in a lack of existing literature on learner silence either to be treated as snapshots or learner behaviour or process in language classrooms. Over decades, with the changing teaching-learning scenarios, it is the need of the hour to research the cause and nature of learner silence in the class. Hence this study attempts to fill that lacuna by surveying the reasons for the silent behaviour of the learners in online and offline teaching and learning contexts in the Indian ESL milieu.

2.2 Research location and context

The study was conducted in the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (South India) where Telugu is the local official language, English and Hindi are learned in school through formal instruction as a second language. In these states, most students prefer engineering programs over graduate programs (Arts/Commerce/Business Administration/Life Sciences). In the present study, a representative sample from four engineering colleges across the states was selected. All the profiles of the learners who took part in the study have similar socio-economic backgrounds. The cultural context does not treat talking as a cultural taboo. Gender discrimination is also absent at least in professional colleges, like the ones chosen for the study. The four colleges identified by the researchers had gender parity with substantial participation enrolment of the female participants.

2.3 Subjects

Fourth semester Bachelor's program in technology (B.Tech) s who experienced online teaching (during their first and second semesters) and offline teaching (third and fourth semesters) were chosen for this study. The subjects aged between 17-19 years, reflected on their learning experiences in online and offline classes. For this study, 125 s from the select colleges in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states were chosen as a representative sample. The learner's cognitive maturity and linguistic proficiency helped in getting appropriate responses for the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

The subjects are aware of the importance of communication skills considering the prerequisite for their placement on successfully completing the course. This study focuses on the reasons for the silent behavior in online and offline teaching-learning contexts while responding to teacher questions.

2.4 The aim and objectives of this study

The advent of ICT and its pervasive use in education resulted in the makeover of language classrooms where the role of teachers, learners, methods, and materials are redefined. The way silence is interpreted in a language classroom also needs to be relooked. During the pandemic, innovations in educational technology brought about a major change in the field of education. Online education was promptly adopted by all teachers and educational institutions, irrespective of their preparedness for this paradigm shift.

In this new normal scenario, the meaning, purpose, and duration of learner silence being interpreted by teachers and researchers have undergone remarkable changes. The rationale of this study is to understand the purpose of learner silence and the influence on English language learning in the ESL context. The study aims to investigate the reasons for silence in offline and online classes when the teacher poses questions or gives oral tasks. The objectives of the study are:

- 1. To understand learner silence when they are expected to be involved in the learning process in the classroom.
- 2. To know the reasons for learner silence during online and offline classes in relation to teacher's questions.

2.5 Methodology

The two tools used for data collection are questionnaires with MCQs and open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews are conducted with about 15% (20 s) of the total subjects and are asked to reveal the activities they are *silently* involved in when the teacher poses questions while teaching in online and offline classes in relation to learning English.

The questions focus on knowing the learners' general reasons for silent behavior in the classroom particularly when the teacher poses questions in the class. The study also attempts to understand learner silence in online and offline learning environments. The following are the central issues that the study sought responses from the respondents:

General engagement when you are silent in the English language class: This helps in understanding the general learning behaviour of the s in the classroom with a prime focus on silence. The question probs into the cognitive processes the learners are involved in when they are expected to be silent in the class.

When a question is posed by your teacher to the whole class: This aspect explores the behaviour of the s when they are expected to be vocal and involved in oral communication in the class. This helps understand the role of teachers in establishing silence in the classroom in the process of language learning. In a traditional classroom setting, the teacher is the creator of the classroom environment and regulates or indoctrinates the class. So the responses to this question help us understand whether the teacher is the factor causing silence in the class or if there are other reasons for it.

Silence in online classes when questions are posed: This part attempts to explore the learners' online learning experiences and the English language learning process while teaching happened online. A deadly experience for all the teachers who are used to teaching offline is that they do not know the reason for the silence of the learners behind the screen. It could be for several reasons, which are neither completely non-learning nor engaged in learning and so have many gray areas.

Behaviour or response when the teacher asked (called out names) to answer a question during an online class: This is one of the most popular or maybe the only way of checking the learners' participation in the class. The actual participation in learning can be understood with the response of the s to this question (sub-set of questions). Their willingness to participate, involvement in the learning process, and/or the reasons for their silence are elicited here.

Mode of instruction (online/offline) facilitated silence or response: This question derives responses that mentioned the difference between the learners' participation in online and offline English language classes and silence when their teacher posed questions in the class. The responses from the learners with reasons for their preferences of staying silent or responding to the teacher in online and offline modes of teaching helped us conclude why a particular mode of instruction is opted for by the s over the other. The reasons also have implications for teachers and stakeholders who have a say in deciding the mode of instruction for language teaching-learning processes.

3. Results of the Study

This section reports learners' answers to the questionnaire and questions posed in the interviews.

The questions are:

- 1. What are you generally engaged in when you are silent in the English language class? Give details/incidents to support your answer.
- 2. What do you do when a question is posed by your teacher to the whole class and if you know the answer?

- 3. How did online classes facilitate your thinking and learning (through silence or speech) of English?
- 4. What did you do when a teacher asked you (called out your name) to answer a question during an online class? Give reasons for your silence/response.
- 5. Which mode of instruction (online/offline) facilitated the English language learning better?

3.1 Findings of the Study

The same questions are posed in the interview with more focus on causes for silence when the teacher posed a question to the class.

Table 1. Reasons for Silent Behaviour

Contexts of Silence↓	Reasons for Silent Behaviour			
	Listening and processing information	Involved in reading/ writing activities	Fear or anxiety to participate in the class	Engaged in interaction to learn better
1. General reasons for silent behaviour	45.6	26%	23.2	7.2
	Prefer answering	Silence as a personality trait (fear and anxiety)	Silence based on Teacher factors	Silence because of lack of Knowledge
2. Question is posed to the whole class	53.1%	18%	26.6%	2.3%
	Listening and processing information	Learned better from other resources	Fear or anxiety to participate in the class	Engaged in other online activities
3. Learning in online classes and silence	23.6%	17.6%	10.2%	33.6%
	Like to Respond	Silence because of other engagements	Fear	
4. Response to teacher questions online	72.6%	20.8%	6.6%	

Q1. In a normal classroom, 45.6% of learners claim that if they are silent they are engaged in some cognitive activity that includes processing the information given, trying to comprehend, reading the information given about the same in textbooks or other sources, listening and thinking to comprehend the concepts being taught, observing the teachers' accent and intonation and trying to imitate. 26% of the learners said they are engaged in the whole process of learning by either reading the textbook while listening to the teacher or preparing notes from the talk. Very interestingly 7.2% of the learners say that they can process the information better only when they are also engaged in a dialogue with the teacher and keep getting ready with questions to pose to the teacher so that the class becomes more engaging and interactive. Unfortunately, about 23.2% of learners, though interested in responding to the teacher and participating in the classroom interaction, prefer to be silent because of the fear and anxiety they have to speak in class. They stated lack of enough/appropriate language to speak, and

fear of being laughed at as the major reasons but all of them claimed that they understand the concepts and 'know' (cognitive state) the answer.

- Q.2. A very interesting revelation is that 53.1 % of the same set of learners said they would prefer to answer in the class when the question is posed to the whole class rather than being silent. Another 26.6% of them said that they would like to answer the question only if the teacher calls out specifically their names and would otherwise remain silent even if they know the answer. The rest held on to their fear and anxiety to answer the questions in class which is perceived as their personality trait. This reiterates and elevates the role of a teacher in classroom interaction in the process of language teaching and learning. If the teacher identifies the learners who are reticent in the class and takes special care to make them participate in the learning tasks, initially giving the learners less/limited oral response tasks and later increasing the time to speak, it would help learners shud their fear and anxiety to perform and will yield good results in enhancing the learners' English language proficiency. It is also to be noted that very few opted for not having enough knowledge of the concept as a reason for not answering the teacher's questions.
- Q.3 This question attempted to understand the silent bevahiour of the learners' online learning. The online teachers became more anxious about the silent behaviour of their s behind the screen because in a physical class they could monitor and be vigilant of what the teacher is doing which is not possible in an online class. They cannot be sure of any learning happening on the other end. So exploring the reasons for silence behind the screen helps teachers understand the learners' silence in a better way. The responses of the learners to this question give better insights into learners' silence in online classes. Only 23.6% of the learners remained focused on the teachers' class. 17.6% of learners said that they found it interesting to learn from other sources and so did not concentrate on what the teacher is teaching online. 10.2% of learners expressed their fear of actively participating in the class. 33.6% of learners confessed that their silence is because of their engagement with other learning websites/web sources. While the learners agreed that they have learned so many new things online, they also confided that they learned more about online learning resources and improved their core subject knowledge rather than what exactly they are expected to learn in the class with the teacher. They confirmed that the aim of language learning in the language classes fizzled out in online classes because there is no one observing them when they can hide in silence behind the screen.
- Q4. But 72.8 % of the same set of learners said that they would speak up in the online class if they are called out by the teacher or chosen by the teacher to answer a particular question. This stands as proof of the claim that communication in the class is teacher-dependent. Even learners who claim their trait of learning to be silent preferred responding to the teacher in the class if their names are called out to answer a question. The only constraint they have is knowing the answer and if they know the answer, be it right or wrong, be it in the accurate language or not, they attempt to answer the question because none can see them online. Everyone in the class can only listen to them and in case someone laughs at them, the respondent will not be able to see or listen to their mocking talk or smiles.
- Q. 5 When it comes to the mode of instruction that better-facilitated language learning, 73.6% of the learners preferred offline, and 20.8% preferred both and 5.6% opted for online. The reasons given by learners are:

They are engaged and involved with their peers in the class. In offline mode, they say, they do not have the comfort of discussing with their peers so freely (without being noticed by their teacher)

The possibility of getting distracted is very less. In online mode, they tend to open other tabs and keep doing other work apart from classroom participation.

In a classroom environment when everyone is engaged in discussions, it boosts their confidence to participate in all activities.

Though silence is the preferred mode of participation in the class while being online by 65.4 % of the learners, they say silence in offline mode has more scope for getting engaged in language learning activities rather than in online mode. This preference and explanation establish the fact that silence in online mode is less used positively by the learners for cognitively engaging or learning activities.

When enquired about their preferred mode to improve their proficiency in language skills, 61.6% of the learners opted for the offline mode while 32.8% said that both the modes are equally comfortable, particularly for listening skills, and the others (5.6%) preferred online mode. The learners

are able to give a list of activities (Just a minute, group discussion, mock interviews, debates and arguments, floor-crossing, role plays, seminars and presentations, youth parliaments, framing questions for quizzes, etc.) that can engage them in speaking activities and reiterated that the teachers use those activities to help them enhance their proficiency in speaking skills.

The major causes of silence in the class particularly when the teacher poses questions as given by the learners are:

Learners wait for the teacher to choose them among others to answer when the question is posed to the whole class.

Silence, even when their names are called out to answer a particular question is primarily because of performance anxiety.

Teacher factors, in specific, teacher's approachability, being unbiased in giving opportunities to interact in the class and giving positive-constructive feedback affect the classroom interaction ability of the learners.

Knowing the answer is not considered to be a major constraint for the learners to respond to the teacher in a language class as they say most of the concepts taught in the English classes were familiar to them.

The role of the classroom environment: Interestingly, the s said that the classroom environment, particularly when it is offline makes the class vibrant as at least a couple of the s in the class are always willing to respond to the teacher or have a dialogue with the teacher even when the teacher is not prepared or planned to give that scope for the s. In online classes, the learners understood that they are expected to be more silent, and this silence can be called unnatural silence as they restricted themselves from participating in the classroom interaction. Natural silence exists only in a face-to-face environment because that is the silence of learning in the presence of the teacher where the teacher can be vigilant and leaves less scope for the learners from deviating from the actual task of learning.

When some of the learners were randomly chosen to interview, some interesting reasons for learners' silence were shared: learners oscillated between their actual behaviour and their ideological belief. These learners gave answers that seem to be acceptable:

silence because the teacher did not ask me the question,

silence because I am involved in some cognitive tasks like taking notes, and

silence because I am listening to the teacher and understanding the concepts.

But when the learners who said they would answer the question immediately when posed are interviewed, they say they desired to answer in the class but most of the time do not answer for the following reasons:

They know the answer and need not prove to the class their knowledge. (It is not the class but the teacher who asked they the question)

They do not generally speak when they are in a crowd (personality trait)

Answering or not answering in the class does not affect their grades in exams (exam-oriented)

They do not like to answer to that teacher (teacher factor) but would like to answer if questioned by some other teacher.

They do not want to be laughed at if they go wrong with their answers.

When asked for their reasons for silence in online classes, they came up with answers on how they engage themselves when they are silent. They include: watching video lectures on other topics of their interest while the online class is on, playing online games, browsing for information they are interested in, and the like. They feel happy that they are not being monitored by their teachers and would like to stay silent even when they know the answer.

3.2 Conclusions and Implications of the study

Silence considered for this study can be defined as a lack of response after the teacher poses questions to the class. It is not short spans of silence to categorise it as a short or long span of wait

time of the teacher by 'no-answer' silence from the learners. It focused on learners' responses when they (s) are invited into the classroom discussion by the teacher. Some of the important revelations of this study regarding teacher-learner factors leading to learner silence confirm the existing literature on silence studies. The results of the study regarding learner silence particularly when a teacher poses questions in the class in both online and offline classes have thought-provoking implications for language teachers in action. One of the findings of the study is that lack of self-confidence impedes s from participating in classroom interactions. In addition, as Meher (2021) states, repeated silent behaviour of the s in the language classroom not only limits opportunities for developing speaking skills but can also affect the learning pace of anxious learners. Teachers need to boost learners' confidence levels by putting in conscious efforts to avoid non-participative silence in the class. The data revealed that learners expect teachers to be more conscious about their participation in the class avoiding meaningless spells of silence in the class.

Also, teachers must express tolerance and consideration for learners so that learners can dispel their fear and anxiety. Due to traditional teaching methods, teachers heavily rely on teacher-centered approaches characterized by an emphasis on lexical and grammatical accuracy, which does little to encourage authentic speech which is often promoted by the educational institutions (King 2013). Only when learners feel confident to communicate in the classroom, do they willingly take part in the activities and tasks tailored for them. It is necessary to improve learners' language competence because it proved to have a facilitative impact on classroom interactions. As learners gain some proficiency in the language, their confidence will increase and so will their oral participation. Therefore, teachers should stir up learners' interests and create as many chances as possible for learners to produce the target language by implementing various activities for classroom interaction. Learners should be often provided with motivation and inspiration to linguistically present themselves in front of the class.

Teachers monitoring the class and directing the learning process have a great effect on learners' in-class performance. Therefore, teachers should encourage learners to ask questions, organize them to collaborate to get answers, and always be ready to support them, which is beneficial for nurturing learners' interaction abilities. Frenzel et al. (2009) mention that social and emotional elements of behaviour, such as emotional silence, can drive teachers into a state of excitement, anxiety, and even anger, especially, because teachers tend to see unresponsive silence negatively, even if there is no negative emotion behind it.

Teachers should try to motivate learners to challenge themselves to answer questions in class without giving them negative feedback. Positive reinforcement can be much more beneficial than negative ones in changing learner behavior. Also, to increase learners' language output, more activities should be employed such as group discussion, role-play, and debates.

By adopting various effective engaging activities and focusing on individual learners whenever possible, teachers can stimulate learners to get involved in learning enthusiastically so that the classroom silence can be broken. Learners should receive mentoring on how to prevent online silence. This mentoring should focus on how to increase the likelihood of teacher's questions receiving answers, and on how to prevent from inadvertently causing silence. Teachers should focus on the silence hotspots in the communication cycle, where online silence is more likely to happen. By making course developers and online instructors aware of these hotspots, courses can be better planned, and instances of online silence can either be prevented or handled before they affect the progress of the learners.

Different personality traits of the learners may have a considerable impact on their contribution to the language class activities (Cole & McCroskey, 2003). Learners can be extroverted or introverted, optimistic, or pessimistic, active or passive. Extroverted learners tend to be more active in presenting themselves than introverted ones since they are willing to share their ideas with others. In class, many introverts are quiet and not interested in in-class interactions and are reluctant to answer questions posed by the teacher.

When it comes to classroom silence, Granger (2004) associates it with disobedience, conflict, and misbehaviour, and in the case of learners taking a listener's role is deception. He argues that silence in the classroom allows learners to retain achievements and assumptions that can leave them vulnerable to their peers and teachers and can be seen as a form of protection. In addition, classroom silence can be maintained by the learners as an emotional resistance to the teacher's authority in the classroom and as a means of passively expressing negative emotions. To avoid such adverse effects

of learner silence in the classroom, creating spaces for interaction with a variety of interactional tasks in the classroom be it virtual or real becomes a major exercise for the teacher during lesson planning.

Silence can be educationally valuable to enable learning. When learners are meticulously guided on how to engage in cognitive activities, silence can yield good learning results. As, Teng (2009) states, silence of the learners in the classroom can be seen as a form of psychological state and behavior that learners perform at the level of thought, emotion, and behavior. The findings of the study emphasize that silence only means a lack of conversation and not a lack of thought. It means that they have limited or inadequate involvement in classroom communication. These findings support existing research (Bao, 2014; King, 2014; Smith & King, 2018), demonstrating the affective factors influencing learner silence and can have an impact on learners' language learning.

4. Limitations of the Study

This study is based on one-time interaction with the learners in a semi-structured interview which is preceded by a questionnaire. The data is not completely triangulated by seeking opinions or responses from the teachers to know how the learners respond to their questions and how they interpret the silence of their learners in the class. The study is also limited to one particular group of learners from one region with one linguistic background in India. It would be more generalizable if the data is collected from various parts of the country resulting in claiming reasons for silence as a nature of Indian ESL classrooms. However, we, as researchers, considered this as a random representative sample and conducted the study.

Declarations

Author contribution : Suvarna Lakshmi G initiated the research ideas, instrument

construction, data collection, analysis, and draft writing; Udaya Mutyala and Ramamuni Reddy C revised the research ideas, literature

review, data presentation and analysis, and the final draft.

Funding statement : The research is not funded by any funding agency.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information: No additional information is available for this paper.

REFERENCES

Bao, D. (2014). Understanding Silence and Reticence: Nonverbal participation in Second Language Acquisition. London & New York: Bloomsbury.

Bao, D. & Ye, Y. (2020). Investigating learner's silent and verbal responses to tasks. *International Journal of Teaching and Education 4(1)*, 61-72. https://doi.org/10.22437/ijolte.v4i1.10469

Bao, D. (2021). Silence is seen through different lenses. Journal of Silence Studies in Education, 1(1), 1-8.

Bates, A.W. (2015) *Teaching in a Digital Age: Guidelines for Designing Teaching and Learning*. Vancouver BC: Tony Bates Associates Ltd.

Beaudoin, M. F. (2008). Reflections on seeking the 'invisible' online learner. In J. Visser, & M. Visser-Valfrey (Eds.), Learners in a changing learning landscape: Reflections from a dialogue on new roles and expectations (pp.213--226). London: Springer, 2008.

Cole, J. G., & McCroskey, J. C. (2000). Temperament and socio-communicative orientation. *Communication Research Reports*, 17, 105-114.

Cotterill, J. (2005). 'You do not have to say anything': Instructing the jury on the defendant's right to silence in the English criminal justice system. *Multilingual* 24: 7–24.

Delima, E. M. (2012). A reticent student in the classroom: A consequence of the art of questioning. *Asian EFL Journal*, (60), 51-69.

- Dhyan, S. (2021). Culture of Silence: A case study of barriers to two-way communication. Academia: *An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*. 11(3).2416-2421. https://doi.org/10.5958/2249-7137.2021.01004.1
- Frenzel, A. C., Goetz, T., Stephens, E. J., & Jacob, B. (2009). Antecedents and effects of teachers' emotional experiences: An integral perspective and empirical test. In P. A. Schutz & M.Zembylas (Eds), *Advances in teacher emotion research: The impact on teachers' lives.* (pp. 129-152). New York: Springer
- Fritschner, L. (2000). Inside the Undergraduate College Classroom: Faculty and s differ on the Meaning of Participation. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 71(3), 342-362.
- Gradinaru, C. (2011). Virtual Communities: A New Sense of Social Intersection. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*. 13(1), 21-35.
- Gradinaru, C. (2016). The Technological Expansion of Sociability: Virtual Communities as Imagined Communities Academicus International Scientific Journal 14(2), 181-190 DOI:10.7336/academics.2016.14.13
- Howard, J.R. & Henney, A.L. (1998) Participation and Instructor Gender in the Mixed-Age College Classroom, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 69(4), 384-405, https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1998.11775141
- Jaworski, A. (2005). Introduction: Silence in institutional and intercultural contexts. *Multilingual-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*. 24(1-2), 1-6. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/mult.24.1-2.1
- King, J. (2013). Silence in the second language classroom. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- King, J. (2014). Fear of the true self: Social anxiety and the silent behaviour of Japanese learners of English. In K. Csizér & M. Magid (Eds.), The Impact of Self-concept on Language Learning (pp. 232-249). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Liu, M. (2005). Reticence in oral English language classrooms: A case study in China. *TESL Reporter*, (38), 1-16.
- Liu, M. & Jackson, J. (2009). Reticence in Chinese EFLs at varied proficiency levels. *TESL Canada Journal* 26(2). [Electronic Version]. Retrieved June 06, 2022, from http://teslcanadajournal.ca/index.php/tesl/article/view/415/245.
- Meyer, K. R. (2007), Engagement in the classroom: An examination of silence and participation. *In the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL*
- Maher, K. (2021). Reframing silence: Insights into language learners' thoughts about silence and speaking-related anxiety. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 1(1), 32-47. https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v1i1.3
- Nakane, I. (2005) Negotiating silence and speech in the classroom. *Multilingual*, 24(2), 75-100. https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.24.1-2.75.
- Smith, L., & King, J. (2018). Silence in the foreign language classroom: The emotional challenges for L2 teachers. In J. D. M. Agudo (Ed.), *Emotions in second language teaching* (pp. 323-340). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Tatar, S. (2005). Why Keep Silent? The Classroom Participation Experiences among Non-Native English Speaking s. *Language and Intercultural Communication*. 5(3). 284 293. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14708470508668902
- Teng, M. H. (2009). Teacher factors in the college English classroom. *Heilongjiang Research on Higher Education*, (4), 146-148.

- Tsou, W. (2005). Improving Speaking Skills Through Instruction in Oral Classroom Participation. *Foreign Language Annals*; 38(1). 46-55.
- Tsui, A. (1996). *Reticence and anxiety in second language learning*. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (eds.). Voices from the Language Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Verma, S. (2017). Silence as Discourse Marker in Multilingual Classrooms in India. *Language and Language Teaching*. 6(2)12
- Xin, C., & Feenberg, A. (2006, Fall). Pedagogy in Cyberspace: The Dynamics of Online Discourse. *Journal of Distance Education*, 21(2), 1-25