

# Non-verbal interaction in the early years: Case study of Mandarin learning in Australia

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## ABSTRACT

Traditionally, early years education is a voice-dominated discipline where scholars pay little attention to children's natural non-verbal communication in second language acquisition (SLA) (Spyrou, 2016). In many cases, children silence is often perceived as a problem and is captured as selective mutism (see, for example, Bligh, 2014). This article looks at a case of child silence as positive communication rather than negative mutism, a topic which is rare in the research discourse of early childhood education. If the discourse does not refer to child silence as mutism, it would then focus on the customary notion of 'the silent period' (Roberts, 2014) rather than on cases of micro silence within naturally occurring social interactions. This is a gap in research on silence in children language learning that this work will address. Since little research has allied this topic with teacher education (Bao 2014), the authors hope to provide implications for teacher practice drawn from data on children's non-verbal interactions during Mandarin learning.



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## 1. Introduction

We are living in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world where the acquisition of an additional language seems indispensable. However, research in second language learning focuses far more on adults' practice than on children's experience. Having said that, the applied linguists emphasise voiced utterances while overlooking non-verbal communication among children and treating it as non-data (see especially Mazzei 2003 and 2007). With this realisation, the study sets out to investigate the role of non-verbal communication in children's second language learning in play context and hopes to share implications on how such silence could inform pedagogy.

While the dynamic between language and silence in the early years is hard, if not impossible, to find in the discourse, we see potential in experimenting with the idea of connecting silence with children's language learning. Our data were gathered from the video and audio recordings in the natural setting of an early childhood service in Sydney, Australia.

The first section of this document provides the research background, highlights the research gaps in the field and explains the current state of silence in children's SLA and the role of teachers in appreciating silence in language teaching. The second section then presents the research methodology of a case study, which involves two anecdotes of children L2 learning through play. The data was collected through video and audio recording at the beginning of children's Mandarin learning

experience and was analysed using discourse analysis and thematic analysis methods. The third section includes data interpretation and implications for language teachers.

### **Discourse on children silence**

This literature review explores an emerging turn in contemporary research, which has gone from focusing on children's voices to considering and questioning the importance of silence in SLA. An overview of the role of silence in second language acquisition (SLA) is presented, with links to young children's learning made. Due to the scarcity of literature targeting children younger than 7 years, the literature review also draws on the discourse about silence among older children and adults where relevant theory seems applicable to our project.

#### *From children voices to children silence*

Ten years before the silent period theory first appeared in 1982 (Dulay et al.), the silent period in the early years was already the subject of research by Sorensen (1972), Kohn & Rosman (1972), Gary (1975), Gibbon (1985). Unfortunately, such research in second language acquisition silence among children did not develop in the past three decades (Bao, forthcoming). More recently, however, developmentally appropriate views of the classic 'silent period' are being challenged (Bligh, 2014). Increasingly, doubts are cast over the idea that silence is a universal stage in second language acquisition for young children, as initially proposed by Dulay et al. in 1982 (Drury, 2013; Roberts, 2014).

Recent studies highlight the importance of attending to children silence (Nicholas & Lightbown, 2008). Significantly, post-structural and post-qualitative researchers contend that it is uncritical to assume that only speech can reflect truth (Spyrou, 2016). Scholars such as Mazzei (2009), MacLure, Holmes & Jones (2010) and more recently Spyrou (2016) claim that it is necessary to move beyond 'the voiced' to consider children's 'undomesticated features' (Mazzei, 2003, p. 48), such as silence, which is not as easily coded as speech is.

Contrary to this emerging trend in literature, research on silence and second language learning in the early years remains confined to the debate on whether silence is a stage in language acquisition or not (Roberts, 2014). This view seems narrow because it is focused on facts but does not delve into processes of how early language evolves as children learn through play with silence being part of that involvement.

The demand for research on silence confronts the current educational research, which for the last thirty years, as Christensen & James (2017) summarise, has focused on listening to children's voices. Spearheaded by technology and digital media, there has been a repositioning from research on children towards research with and by children (Christensen & James, 2017). For example, the Mosaic approach (Clarke & Moss, 2011), a research method aimed at soliciting children's voices through photos, drawings and walking tours, exemplifies how early childhood researchers have strived to find research methods to bring forth children's voices.

Amidst research on voices, silence must be included as a component of multilayered expressions by children. Indeed, attending to children's silence is beginning to have increased appeal for early-year researchers (Lewis, 2010). Recent research on silence in educational contexts has indicated that silence communicates meaningful messages (Bligh, 2014; Martín-Bylund, 2018; Tao & Zhang, 2021). Children silence is problematised and understood as pregnant with meaning. Moments of non-speech start to be viewed as not neutral or empty spaces but communicative (Lewis, 2010; Martín-Bylund, 2018). This view challenges the widespread idea that silence is only problematic, which is held by both teachers and learners (Tao & Zhang, 2021). Another myth to dispel is that silence represents a sign of laziness or ignorance (Bligh, 2014).

We witness a welcome shift in research focus as richer and more complex understandings of silence in children's second language acquisition (SLA) is tentatively explored. Overall, however, the discourse is not rich in the actual silent experiences of young children.

#### *Silence as negotiation*

Recently, silence in second language acquisition has been explored as a time when students feel lost or ponder on their confusion (Bligh, 2014; Haukås et al., 2018). The so-called 'wavering silence'

(Spyrou, 2016, p. 12) is usually ambiguous and hard to decipher. Silence in this case represents a way of regaining calmness after confusion, as is typical in Confucian practice. In line with this interpretation, and from a psychoanalytic perspective (Granger, 2004), it is believed that silence in language acquisition may be a strategy to cope with anxiety.

Silence, therefore, may be more than a way for the individual to quieten themselves and represent 'a necessary moment of suspension between two linguistic, sociocultural and psychical selves – a place where old and new identities collide, intersect and perhaps eventually engage' (Granger, 2004, p. 41). As such, the individual learning a second language lives in a liminal space where, through silence, they attempt to reconcile their first and second language, as well as negotiate their old and new self (Granger, 2004). The question remains whether such an interpretation of silence would be valid for younger children, as research that looks at children younger than 7 years and their use of silence is still lacking and necessary to better understand SLA in this age group.

#### *Silence as child expression*

At times silence is hard to decode in children, and the role of the teacher is crucial to encourage the child to express herself (Spyrou, 2016). Reflecting on the interaction with the child, the characteristics and positioning of those involved in the exchange (e.g., adult/child, teacher/student), and their respective values support this (Spyrou, 2016). Additionally, despite the urge to make silence intelligible, teachers should permit themselves to accept its ambiguities (Mazzei, 2003). Indeed, not knowing about silence is an opportunity as it demands diverse interpretations, offering the chance to explore innovative pedagogical practices and research in the early years (Martín-Bylund, 2018). Ultimately, being aware of silence as a powerful means of communication used by children to express themselves can facilitate more meaningful teacher-child interactions and, consequently, quality learning.

#### *Intentional use of silence among children*

Intentional silence may be particularly relevant to children. For example, in research conducted in an early childhood service in Sweden, a pre-schooler decided to not reply to the teacher when asked whether she liked the food on the table (Martín-Bylund, 2018). Through this act, the child avoided risks because if she acknowledged wanting the food, she would then be asked to eat it; if she changes her mind, she might be criticised (which had happened on a previous occasion) (Martín-Bylund, 2018). Therefore, children may be 'capable but silent' (King & Harumi, 2021, p. 161), and while being able to speak the second language, they may remain willingly silent (Martín-Bylund, 2018).

Silence can also represent the child's agentic refusal to engage in an activity (Bao, 2014; Bligh, 2014). A child's agency is about 'being able to make choices and decisions to influence events and to have an impact on one's world' (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009, p. 48). Language learners through agency use silence to actively negotiate their level of participation and interest in language learning. Silence, therefore, can be a way children handle power disparities by demonstrating their agency (King & Harumi, 2020; Liu, 2002).

It is known that children who are forced to behave in ways they are not comfortable with will cause slower progress in language acquisition (Bao, 2014). By avoiding speech, children actively use silence to affect their surroundings (Martín-Bylund, 2018). This, therefore, maybe viewed as a positive non-verbal tactic utilised by the child to assert herself. Perceiving silence as a strategy also invites educators to view the child as 'active and performative, even if it might be in terms of resistance' (Martín-Bylund, 2018, p. 356). This concept is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 1989), which celebrates the child's voice. Educators should strive to be in tune with children and understand their silence as non-verbal attempts at communicating (Horne-Kennedy, 2014). As young children hardly have any authority in second language acquisition, silence may represent the child's assertion of their needs, and a request for non-linguistic space.

While research on silence is growing, and its value in interpersonal interactions and research is being recognised, studies that link young children's silence to second language acquisition remain scarce. Furthermore, we do not have information on how early childhood teachers interact with children's silence in the context of preschool education. Since silence in SLA may also mean that children are not speaking yet yearning to be nominated by the teacher to speak (King & Harumi, 2020)

or request peer support (Sert, 2015), further studies on children's intentional use of silence when they engage in second language learning in the early years are needed.

This literature review first acknowledged the shift occurring in childhood research, i.e., the move away from the debate on whether silence is a stage in language acquisition or not, towards richer understandings of children's communicative micro-social silence. Next, the possibility that children younger than 7 may use silence as a negotiation strategy to facilitate second language acquisition has been explored, as this process is known to occur in older children and adults (Ellis, 2005). Next, children's intentional use of silence has been considered.

In sourcing literature, it became clear that studies on the role of silence in young children's second language acquisition remain scant. Little is known about how very young children aged birth to 5 years of age and educators negotiate silence in super diverse early learning contexts such as Australian preschools. Furthermore, one of the issues with research on children's SLA is that it does not focus specifically on young children. Nicholas and Lightbown (2008) suggest that very young children (2–7 years old) differ from older children in the way they acquire a second language. Understanding such differences would have implications for teachers' pedagogical practices too. Research in this area is also essential to problematise current understandings of children's voices.

Furthermore, investigating children's silence in second language acquisition helps promote linguistically and culturally sensitive approaches to language teaching in Australia's preschools. We argue that further research is required to fill the gap around the role of silence in young children's SLA. Furthermore, the literature review highlighted the importance of training teachers to understand and value children's silence. Teachers' initial training should include silence as a pedagogical occurrence (Bligh, 2014). Preservice teachers need to be explicitly trained to understand and appreciate silence beyond the falsely held assumption that it is troublesome (Tao & Zhang, 2021), perhaps a sign of laziness or ignorance (Bligh, 2014). We claim this area requires further research to promote a richer understanding of children's silence in SLA.

## 2. Methodology

This section discusses the research approach, research participants, data generation strategies, and data analysis methods for this study.

### 2.1. Research approach

The project was conducted using a qualitative case study approach in which the story of children's second language learning in an early learning centre is the case. It is through a case conceptualisation that we will be able to look deeply into individuals' activities and concerns, which would include issues related to participants' interaction, behaviour, beliefs, perceptions, and challenges. As Merriam (1988) and Baskarada (2014) highlight, case studies would embrace intensive, holistic documentation and analysis of a single phenomenon or unit.

The choice of qualitative methodology comes from the need to utilise the naturalistic setting of an early childhood centre to seek an in-depth understanding of the topic focus, which in this case refers to children's silence in language learning settings. The reason for the interest in authentic context comes from our passion to focus on observation of natural reality rather than to interfere with the phenomenon under study. As Patton (2001, p. 39) indicates, in context-specific settings, "the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest." By being qualitative in the investigation, numerical data will not be employed for generalisation of findings but the nature of events will be characterised. This awareness conforms with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) explanation that qualitative research does not involve statistical procedure but, in the words of Patton (2001, p. 39), allows phenomenon of interest to "unfold naturally."

### 2.2. Research participants and data generation strategies

The research project will be conducted in an early childhood service located in Northern Sydney. The participants include children from various cultural backgrounds, aged four to five., Pseudonyms will be used for the children's names to protect the identities of the participants. The first author a Mandarin teacher acts as the participant in the research study. She is undertaking Ph.D. study and possesses four years' experience in working with young children. In this project, she has been teaching Mandarin to children in the early childhood service for one year. The curriculum, teaching content,

materials, and learning experiences are designed by her. Her insider knowledge and experience contribute to the authenticity of the research. The data gathering method/tool was collected through video and audio recording, which was conducted during Mandarin lessons three times a week, planned follow-up activities, and any other natural occurred play incidents that involves Mandarin learning.

### 2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis allows the researcher not only to focus on the data generated from fieldwork and how systematically they are presented but also in ways that such data can be unpacked into interpretation (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). In the study, thematic analysis and discourse analysis will be utilised as the foundation of data exploration. The thematic analysis focuses on identifying and describing data into different themes, which moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases (Guest et al., 2011). Through this analysis, children's linguistic behaviour and vocabulary learning would be explored under various play scenarios. Meanwhile, discourse analysis is utilised in the understanding of language and behaviour in context. As explained by Gee (1990), this analytical tool is more than just a look into spoken or written language. According to Macartney, Ord and Robinson (2008), discourse theory helps researchers explore and explain how the social meanings, arrangements and power relations are socially, culturally and historically negotiated, contested and produced. Through this examining lens, the authors were hoping to reveal the dynamics of silence in children's second language learning that occurred in child-play context. The whole ideas of using two methods of analysis are to ensure that every sub-theme emerging from the data will have a chance of being well contextualised in its social settings rather than being discussed in isolation. It is also because, in my experience as a child educator, every moment of language learning is a social moment.

## 3. Data analysis and discussion

The discussion of this article is based on the data that was collected in the first two months of children's Mandarin learning. Children engaged in teacher-guided dramatic play and art play activities. To make learning experiences more vivid and engaging, the teacher utilised children's routines as part of the learning activities. For example, the teacher turned the morning-tea event to be a role-play activity where children acted as customers who had to order food from the teacher in Mandarin. To make that happen, the children would need to memorise and say the names of food. Another type of play activity occurred based on children's interests. For example, while children were engaged in a drawing activity, the teacher encouraged them to draw their family members.

The excerpts below show two different meanings in non-verbal communication by the children. In the first narrative, the child resists a language that is too new for her while in the second narrative, the child accepts the language and responds to it. In both cases, silence denotes various expressions in children's early language learning.

### 3.1. Narrative 1 – *Children communication of resistance*

To contextually engage the children in learning new Mandarin words, the teacher organised for them to participate in hands-on activities. One of the planned activities that combined routine participation and early language learning is art play where the children were encouraged to draw their family members. Six children participated in this activity during which three of them non-verbally engaged in the communicative process to various degrees. One child, Chalise was drawing an image on a piece of paper when the teacher approached him to look over.

Chalise: This is a present.

Teacher: Can you say 礼物 (li wu)? That means present in Mandarin!

The child responded to this request by quietly looking down at his paper. Then the teacher moved to a second child, Orson, who was drawing a monster.

Teacher: What are you drawing?

Orson: I'm drawing a monster.

Teacher: We are drawing families. Is there a monster in your home?

Noticing that, the teacher decided to leave him alone for a moment while initiating a new instant of interaction with a third child, Niki, who was not drawing anything on the paper yet.



Teacher: Can you draw something?

Niki: ... (no response)

Each of these interactions between the teacher and every child shows that the children to various degrees engaged in non-verbal communication at this early stage of the second language learning. Chalise ceased to actively involve himself in the activity and stared at his work without speaking after he was asked to repeat the Mandarin vocabulary 'li wu'. He looked confused and stared at his drawing. Orson and Louise remained silent before explaining a reason for not responding to the request. Niki kept silent during the whole learning event and did not participate in the drawing activity. He looked inactive and was reluctant to respond to the teacher. Interestingly, those silent moments occurred after the teacher enforced learning by eliciting repetition from the children. Hinder of learning arises when children are required to perform in ways that they are not comfortable with (Bao, 2014).

As the children resisted the teacher's request of shadowing the word either because they might not have developed an interest in a new language or might be struggling to pronounce words in Mandarin. However, the fact that the children did not verbally refuse the teacher means that they might be reluctant to perform the task that they were demanded. In this learning episode, children employed non-verbal communication as a tool to express their voices and choices. Telling opinions either verbally or non-verbally can be seen as child agency in early childhood education.

### 3.2. Narrative 2 – *Children acceptance and processing of a new language*

This narrative is based on video data collected at the beginning of children's Mandarin learning. To contextualise and engage the children as early as possible, the educator utilised the everyday routine in the room as a learning resource. In this scenario, the teacher turned morning-tea event into a role-play activity in which the children were guided to roleplay customers who ordered food from a waiter (acted by the teacher) in Mandarin. To make that happen, the children would need to memorise and say names of food.

At this early stage of the second language learning, the teacher introduced a reason for using Mandarin as a way of involving the children in this language, that is, through contextualised play.

Teacher: Mummy and Daddy speak English at home.

Ash (one of the children): I only speak normal, like what I'm talking about right now.

Teacher: Yeah, that is English, because we all live in Australia. But if you go to another country, you might have to speak another language. For example, if I want to talk to my mummy and daddy, I have to speak Mandarin. If I talk to you guys, I need to speak English.

After the introduction came the input of language in context. The children were allowed to listen to the teacher's instruction, observed her request and processed what the teacher asked them to do. The excerpt below shows that instant when the teacher started introducing the names of food.

Teacher: What is this? (Pointing to the banana)

One child: Banana

Teacher: Can we say '香蕉 (xiāng jiāo)'?

Children: Xiāng jiāo

Teacher: Later I will let you guys choose. But you have to tell me in Mandarin. This is 'xiāng jiāo', 'xiāng jiāo. This is 梨 (lí).

Children: 'Lí'

Teacher: That's easy, isn't it? This is?

One child: Apple

Teacher: 苹果 (píng guǒ)

Ash: Píng guǒ

Child Leo: It's like pink (this child has been quiet for the whole learning experience).

Teacher: Yeah, it's like pink. This is 面包 (miàn bāo).

Children: Miàn bāo

Teacher: 'Miàn bāo' means bread.

Ash: What's the banana call again? (other children were quiet)

Teacher: Xiāng jiāo.

Ash: Xiāng jiāo.

Teacher: Well done! This is 'lí'

Child Leo: It's like a sleeve.

Teacher: Yeah, it's like sleeve. But it's 'lí'. Means pear

Children: Lí

Teacher: This is 'píng guǒ'.

After introducing these words that denote food items on the table, the play activity began with children curiosity and teacher guidance. Below is an interactional moment between the teacher and a child named Chalise.

Teacher: Alright now it's time to order! I'm going to be the waitress. You guys take the order from me. Chalise, do you like to order?

Chalise: Apple?

Teacher: Do you want this?

(Chalise nodded his head).

Teacher: Píng guǒ

Chalise: Píng guǒ

Teacher: Well done! 'píng guǒ'. What else?

Chalise: ....

Teacher: It's okay. What else?

Chalise: A... banana

Teacher: Xiāng jiāo

Chalise: ....

Teacher: Would you like 'miàn bāo' (bread)?

Chalise: Pear

Teacher: Lí and? miàn bāo

Chalise: Miàn bāo

*After that, the teacher moved on to involve a second child, Miles, in another instant of interaction. As the teacher called out the child's name, he approached the food table with excitement.*

Teacher: Mile's turn

Miles: (with excitement) I want... I want... (pointing to apple)

Teacher: Píng guǒ

Miles: Píng guǒ. And.. (pointing to the banana)

Teacher: Xiāng jiāo

Miles: Xiāng jiāo

The teacher then called on Ash who had been actively asking for repetitions from the teacher.

Ash: Mian bao

Teacher: Good job!

Ash: I don't know what the fruits' names are.

Teacher: It's okay. píng guǒ

Ash: Do you know what the pear is called? lí

Teacher: Well done! What else?

Ash: (thinking a little) what the banana called again?

Teacher: Xiāng jiāo

Ash: Apple?

Teacher: Píng guǒ

Ash: I want píng guǒ

It is noticed that the exchanges above contain more teacher talk than children's responses due to the early use of Mandarin. However, the nature of communication seems natural and does not socially differ from how the children normally behave in English. Despite minimal L2 utterances on the child's part, the social functions of language use are the same as the same routine in the use of English. That is, being non-verbal and less verbal does not fundamentally change the curious and exciting nature of the interaction. The social functions of the scenarios include processing and recalling, noticing, and accepting.

One, language processing and recalling is evident. The teacher introduced the word píng guǒ (苹果), Chalise promptly responded to that by repeating the word. When the food was offered with the question 'Do you want this?' The child nodded and accepted it. This behaviour shows an appropriate response, which demonstrated not only the child's understanding of words but also a natural response to them. Silence, in this sense, plays a social function as it is coupled with a cooperative behaviour of accepting the food of the child's choice. Drawn from this dynamic, one cannot say that without verbalisation, interaction fails to happen. Instead, communication proceeds with teacher utterances, children listening and mutual responses.

Two, noticing the differences among languages is demonstrated. While the teacher was checking with the children whom they use different languages with, a child named Leo did not speak a word. However, when the teacher started teaching the names of the fruits, Leo voluntarily made two comments about the similarities between the two languages. One is 'píng guǒ' (apple) is like 'pink', the other is 'lí' (pear) which is like 'sleeve'. This instant of participation demonstrated the seemingly hidden reality that during his initial silent moments, Leo was indeed actively engaging in internal work and quietly made the connection between the two languages. It was such input processing in the child that eventually emerged as his output, which shows clear evidence of subtle productive silence that would easily be overlooked had the incident not been documented as observed materials.

Three, instants of children recognising and accepting another language in communication are clearly exhibited. Ash actively asked for repetitions from the teacher for the vocabulary that he then used in the play activity. This event vividly signifies the child's internalisation of the communication rules (i.e., saying the word to earn the food) together with his acceptance of another language rather than English for interaction. During the non-verbal interactions, the child attempted to recall some Mandarin words as he was aware that these words are welcomed in the activity.

The entire scenario reflects several important features of communication, which are processing and recalling, noticing, and accepting. It is important to note that the use of Mandarin in these instants instead of English does not cause interaction breakdown. Despite the minimal language, the routine proceeds without any difficulty. Such evidence shows that non-verbal communication plays a role and does not handicap the children in relating well to the teacher. According to Armstrong & Ferguson (2010), the expressions should be suitable to the context.



### 3.3. Data interpretation and implications for language teaching: pedagogical silence

The data demonstrates how the value of non-verbal interactions acts out different social functions in children's early second language learning in a play context. Non-linguistic communication is identified as meaningful in children's language learning. Different children express learning in various ways. Some enjoy learning through observation; others prefer hands-on involvement; Some prefer to speak individually while others enjoy participating in group responses. Some children tend to maintain complete silence until they feel comfortable with their surrounding (Ashtoworth & Wakefield, 1994).

#### *Respecting children's voices by supporting different forms of communication*

As shown in the data discussion, the children expressed their voices both verbally and non-verbally. However, the discourse in children's language learning seldom recognises but focuses on supporting children's agency through the audible voices (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Spyrou, 2016). Through non-linguistic expression, the children participate and control interactions in their way. This is opposed to voice-dominated classrooms where teachers assume they lead learning by demanding speech through imitation and repetition. When that happens, children would have little space to show agency and exhibit genuine needs. Data from this project, however, show the child's request for non-linguistic social space in the demanded activity. Drawn from this, non-verbal interaction proves to be meaningful to young learners who possess hardly any authority in language classes. In response to such a need, early childhood language teachers might like to understand, appreciate and analyse such expressions for adjusting teaching strategies. To bring out individual personalities and meet children's various learning styles, the teacher might like to encourage unplanned, and self-expressive responses (Saracho & Spodek, 2013; Torrance, 1963), provide space for free choices from the children as young learners easily lose interest in activities that are predictable (Clark, 1990), and support different forms of communication.

#### *Providing non-vocal space for the formation of being, becoming and belonging*

As suggested by Bang and Winther-Lindquist (2016), silence as "nothingness" should be deliberated as "human transformations of their cultural being and becoming" page number needed. At the beginning of the language learning, the children treated speaking an additional language as an 'abnormal behaviour'. While ceasing to speak and processing the explanations from the teacher, the children psychologically accepted the new language and started opening up to it. Teachers should note that creating a safe space is significant in allowing children to individually process information (Granger, 2004). In the unspoken moments, the children might alter their beliefs and transform positively in acknowledging, practicing, and obtaining new information. This helps children actively absorb another language and move into a multicultural society that strongly aligns with the value of the Early Years Learning Framework.

#### *The need for research on pedagogical silence in early-year language education*

This research has focused on experiences with silence in foreign language learning from a child's perspective rather than from an educator's perspective. To engage in this area, the research discourse might need to explore teacher education, belief and experience with silence in second language learning. Arguably, teachers' self-perceptions of cultural and linguistic practices play a powerful and intricate role in helping children achieve academic and social potential (McSwain, 2001).

## 4. Conclusion

This article through research attempt has pointed out the social dimensions of non-linguistic communication among young children, which is currently under-explore by the discourse on children's second language learning. As Poland and Pederson (1998) highlight, researchers often attempt to look for solutions to overcome silence as an obstacle rather than recognising it as a legitimate space of learning and teaching. This article through anecdotal evidence has argued that silence deserves a worthwhile place in children's second language learning that hosts children's learning needs such as exhibiting agency, recalling words and signifying confusion. Based on all this, the study has shared implications for pedagogical enactment and research on teachers' experience with the child's less visible learning space.

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