Silent Students with Voices:

An Exploration of Students' Silence in an Algerian EFL Setting

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Abstract

Many studies have considered silent engagement as a form of classroom participation and learning. However, many silent students in language classrooms are still perceived lacking language competence, self-confidence, and they are considered shy and introverted.

This study explores the experiences of a group of Algerian students of English at an Algerian university, who tend to be silent in the classroom, and the perceptions of their teachers regarding classroom silence and classroom participation. A focused ethnographic approach is taken. This research perceives silent students' classroom participation as a process informed by prior-learning experiences, current social and interpersonal relationships and context-related teaching and learning practices.

Thus, as a whole, it investigates the learning environment's influences on students' uses of silence and the different conceptualisations of classroom participation in university classrooms. It also investigates the perceptions of silence among students and teachers. The research findings suggest complex factors influencing silence in the classroom such as teachers' behaviours and fear of poor grading, as well as embracement and the need to vary classroom interaction patterns and teaching and learning approaches in order to cater for individual students, such as those with a tendency to learn silently. This can lead to students adopting different learner identities including a silent learner identity and unconsciously adapting them depending on their perceptions of the value of classroom participation, their academic level, classroom norms and their interpersonal relationships.

Acknowledging the complexity of students' silence, this study suggests the importance of students' voice in negotiating classroom participation and teaching practices and calls for the importance of inclusive teaching techniques to accommodate students with diverse learning preferences.

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Table of Contents

List of tables

List of Abbreviations

BA- Bachelor's degree

EFL- English as a Foreign Language

ESL- English as a Second Language

ELT- English Language Teaching

FLA- Foreign Language Anxiety

LMD- Licence, Masters, Doctorate

UK- United Kingdom

USA- United States of America

Chapter One

General Introduction

1. Introduction

In language classes, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the context of this study, oral participation is considered a fundamental aspect of students' language learning. Students' oral participation often signifies the active engagement and investment of students in their learning. By contrast, students who rarely talk or are silent can sometimes be stigmatised as passive and disengaged from the perceived active learning. Moreover, students who are silent are often stereotyped as lacking competence, shy and introverted.

Silent engagement is perceived by many scholars to be a form of learning and classroom participation (Ollins, 2008; Lausch, 2018, Bao, 2014, 2020a,2020b). Therefore, silent students can be no less engaged, involved, and invested in their learning than other more talkative students. To explore this argument, investigating how silent students' classroom participation works and why students choose to withdraw from the oral participation, which is favoured in some language classes, is needed to add the body of research about the diversity of learning and to support the inclusive approaches for students with varied learning preferences.

This thesis aims to explore the perceptions of a group of Algerian students and teachers in relation to classroom silence and participation in a Higher Education setting, with an explicit focus on students who tend to be silent in the classroom, their learning choices and learning experiences. This focused-ethnographic study took place in the Department of English in a University situated in the western part of Algeria. The main participants involved in the study were five teachers of English and eight students of English in their second year of a bachelor's degree, or Licence as it is called in Algeria, in addition to periphery participants. The main finding of the study is recognising the complex nature of a silent learner identity, which makes part of other learning identities, suggesting also that participants are unaware of the dynamic nature of their identities. Participants in the study provided knowledge about the setting and their perceptions about the teaching and learning practices, explained power

relations and assessment procedures, and highlighted the importance of students' voice in guiding classroom research and classroom practices.

The study explored how participants held different positions when discussing classroom silence. Both teachers and silent students seemed to have confident and fixed explanations for certain events at the beginning, however as the study progressed, these positions and explanations for events and identities were altered, negotiated and sometimes rejected.

I conducted this thesis through a focused ethnography methodology see Section 4.1.3.1 to understand: how silent students perceive their English language learning, the reasons for being silent in the classroom, the way teachers respond to silent students, the role of different learning environments on students' participation; and finally the effects of assessment practices on students' oral engagement.

This qualitative study informed by the interpretive paradigm, described in Section 4.1.1, was conducted via unstructured classroom observations, interviews, fieldnotes and students' diaries, all of which contributed to understanding the participants' perspectives and behaviours. These are described in detail in Section 4.3.

1.1. My background and personal motivation

In this section, I explain my personal motivation to carry out this research and show how many anecdotes and experiences that I had as a silent student became meaningful after I started dealing with students myself. Therefore, I will start this section backwards, first my experience with teaching students from my neighbourhood in my house and then reaching into the past to my experience as a student of English at university.

As a former student at the university where data was collected, I completed my MA degree in English Language Teaching, and learnt about language learning theories, approaches to teaching and assessment techniques for each of the four language skills. Students were practising teaching with each other, each session a student or pairs of students would practise certain aspects related to, for example, language learning theories, how to give feedback, how to teach language skills, and how to do a lesson plan. These experiences were rich, but they were simulated, a student pretends to make mistakes to allow the student who is teaching to correct them. This practice was only possible because of the teacher responsible for the specialty. Otherwise, the current vocational system does not provide teacher training for graduates before official recruitment and the training often takes place months after the

teacher is offered a job. So, although my speciality stands for English Language Teaching (ELT), I found myself carrying many theoretical concepts with little knowledge on how to apply them in real teaching situations, and as my goal at the time was to be a secondary school teacher, I felt the need to learn more about how to deal with real students in real-life situations.

In the neighbourhood, many children used to come to me to help them do their homework, mostly related to French. However, I had also students of middle and secondary school asking me to teach them English. I saw this as an opportunity to gain knowledge about the textbooks, familiarise myself with the areas where students struggle the most and to try some of the theoretical knowledge that I acquired during my course.

Teaching in summer was a great experience as I felt that students were truly interested in learning English. I used songs, films, cartoons, and games. We worked collaboratively; and although they were shy at times, they spoke whenever I asked them to. Many of these students had a low level, therefore, mixing both middle and secondary school was not an issue. By the end of the summer, they were able to introduce themselves, talk about their hobbies, and identify the correct use of tenses. However, once the school year started, their focus shifted to how to achieve grades at school. Their requests of lessons became solely related to how to answer text comprehension questions, apply specific grammar rules, and to memorise ready-made paragraphs to use in written examinations. Oral practice seemed unimportant to them and at school they were not participating in the classes.

I found myself angry at times, disappointed in them and in myself. I mostly thought that I was not teaching them properly, otherwise why would they keep silent. Sometimes, I helped them do homework about written self-expression, and made them practise it orally and then on the day when the teacher asked them to read it aloud, they did not, they handed in the written form and avoided reading it aloud. That puzzled me, but then I realised how I was just the same, except that seeing it from the perspective of "the teacher" was so different than looking at it from the perspective of a student.

I would not describe myself as a naturally silent person. On the contrary, I was perceived by many as talkative and self-confident, so much so that on a day of choosing the classroom representative in my first year at university, all students called my name, including those I did not know, simply because I participated a lot and did not seem shy to take that position.

Starting the third year of my bachelor's degree, I suddenly stagnated in a silent state. When I think back about it, I was assigned to study with a new group of students, half of them were repeating the year which meant that the third year seemed hard to pass, I had new teachers whose severe reputations preceded them, and I chose to study a specialty which did not match my skills.

To adjust to this new environment, I simply observed how students participated and how teachers responded. In the first week, I remember entering a session on psycholinguistics where there were images of a brain on the projector and many students were ready to answer questions about Broca's and Wernicke's areas. It may seem strange, but I found myself silent starting from that session. I questioned my level and became afraid to participate within a group of students who knew the anatomy of the brain. Thus, the reason for why many students have repeated the year seemed to have an explanation that third year is beyond my language and intellectual competence and out of my comfort zone.

By the end of that semester and after the exam results were released, many teachers started asking about specific students, me included, wondering why we were silent in the classroom. This had been happening all the time to other students, but I never questioned it before it happened to me. Some teachers claimed that they had never seen me before. I was a silent student who did her homework, was attentive and engaged in all aspects of learning, except speaking voluntarily. I was not silent all the time though, I was not silent with all teachers, and typically I was not silent outside the classroom. During the second semester, I started doing oral presentation, but I remained silent whenever I had the choice to talk.

It was these experiences which influenced my interest in silent learners with regard to classroom research and English language teaching. Moreover, a keen interest in the stereotypical discourse surrounding silent students led me to decide upon this thesis topic.

1.2. Developing the focus of the thesis

Experiences as those noted above subsequently established the belief that being silent can happen overnight, and silent students may not have always been silent. More importantly, silent students cannot be categorised and attributed characteristics as if their silent nature is static.

Although I was a silent student when I taught those students in my house, I still believed as a "teacher" that my students should have participated and talked. On the edge of our

subconsciousness, oral participation and speaking in the classroom remain favourable and an easy way for a teacher to judge whether a student is engaged or not. Importantly, my judgement was based on my conviction that my students could participate in those given activities because they knew the answers or had prepared for the activities.

During university English classes, I noticed that fostering the speaking skill and dialogic learning were mainly limited to the oral production sessions. Students simulated dialogues, practiced the listening skill, and did oral presentations. The time for students to practise orally in the classroom was often small due to many reasons including having limited hours per week for oral production, teachers' preferred ways of teaching and managing classes which can favour close-ended interactions even in oral classes, and the nature of lesson content which may not include discussion time. Also, teachers might be burdened to finish the curriculum on time and left feeling that there is no choice but to proceed with limited opportunities for oral discussion. Linking these observations to the existing literature on students' classroom silence in different language learning settings allowed me to develop an awareness that there was more to students' classroom silence than just lack of interest, ability or self-confidence.

The existing research about Algerian classrooms explained students' lack of oral participation in the EFL settings as a result of the gap between pre-tertiary and university education. To my knowledge, various studies sought to find solutions for what is referred to as "failure" in classroom oral participation by seeking to implement new techniques or enhancing students' learning strategies. Between identifying a problem and implementing solutions, there seem to be few studies which tackle the nature and perspectives of silent students and teachers, their perceptions of classroom silence and their interpretations of the existing teaching and learning cultures which may lead to a lack of oral participation. Therefore, if silence is to be considered a problem in the Algerian EFL classroom, there should first be some insight into its nature and uses among students, before proposing solutions to deal with it.

When I entered the field, my initial aim was to understand why students are silent and how teachers react to this silence. This aim diverged to include how students perceive their silence, how personal experiences and critical incidents in their lives as learners which might lead them to be silent, and the ways teachers interpreted students' silence. Aspects including different forms of participation, the nature of engagement with peers, teachers' oral feedback

to students, the way lessons were delivered, power dynamics and forms of assessment were observed and discussed with participants. The interpretive qualitative paradigm was particularly helpful in allowing me to understand participants' experiences and particularities in relation to their social context and to interpret and make sense of incidents and claims that initially appeared inconsistent and contradictory. I could gradually make sense of constructs related to teaching practices and students' perspectives regarding the cultures and dynamics within the learning environment and realised both the importance of the students' voice in guiding classroom research and that silent students are also exhibiting other learning identities, beyond their silent learner identity, that can encompass roles and positions of leadership, agency, and future imagined selves.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

The general aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of a group of EFL students' participation and silence in English classrooms in an Algerian university and thus inform educational and pedagogical practices. The learning environment proved to have an impact on students' silence in the EFL language classroom.

This thesis sought to uncover the students' triggering learning experiences which made them be or choose to be silent in the classroom, their perceptions of the teaching practices they had experienced, and their perspectives regarding agency in learning. It also investigated their awareness of their learning difficulties and their needs with regard to teaching materials and teachers' support. Based on ongoing reflection and the existing literature in the field, I formulated my research questions and research methodology. These research questions were then are answered through the application of multiple research instruments and use of thick description.

Since the aim of the study from the beginning was to explore students' silence in the EFL classroom, the following research question was posed:

- How is silence perceived and used in the EFL classrooms?
  a. To what extent are students aware of the factors contributing to their silence?
  b. To what extent are teachers aware of the factors contributing to their students' silence?

Then, once in the field and in the early stages of data analysis, the learning environment started to become a dominant theme in the thesis. What I used to call classroom dynamics,

became part of the whole learning environment. Therefore, the following question was formulated during data collection.

- To what extent is students' oral participation in the EFL classroom affected by the learning environment?

Language assessment practices is a theme which I did not think of at the beginning of the thesis, yet it proved its importance in the early stages of data collection. This research question aims to understand the relevance of assessments in students' learning; why participants felt the need to mention assessment as an indicator of their learning and a factor in their silence, and also the relevance of different forms of assessments in the setting.

- In what ways can language assessment practices affect students' in-class choices concerning oral participation and silence?

I sought to answer these research questions throughout the analysis chapters five, six and seven and through a further discussion in chapter eight.

1.4. Importance of the study

This study is significant in that it provides a better understanding of students' classroom participation in higher education classrooms and of the way silence is manifested, and thus has practical implications for everyone involved in the process, including institutions, teachers, language students, and their peers and also has a contextual, academic, pedagogical, and theoretical contributions to the field of ELT in particular and teaching and learning in other languages in general.

This research also makes an important contribution to existing literature by examining the negotiation of classroom participation from different perspectives. First, although this issue has received numerous researchers' attention, few studies have investigated students and teachers' perceptions together in one study. By taking account of relatively silent students' voices, and teachers' views, this research seeks to achieve a comprehensive understanding of students' classroom interaction challenges.

Contextually, the present research work contributes to the literature on students' silence by including this case of the Algerian EFL classroom. There have been studies on silence in the second language classrooms, mainly in Asian countries and in intercultural contexts, notably, Japan (Harumi, 1999; Harumi, 2010; Harumi, 2001; King, 2011; Kim et al., 2016), China (Heng, 2017), Hong Kong (Shao & Gao, 2016), Iran (Aghazadeh &Abedi, 2014), Turkey (Saylag, 2014) and Malaysia (Soo & Goh, 2013). This study thus aims to provide a

better understanding of EFL students' classroom silence from the perspective of both students and teachers in a mono-cultural setting in Algeria.

Although policy makers emphasised the need to move to a learner-centred approach, formative assessment and to foster the active engagement of students in decision making in the last educational reform launched in the academic year 2004/2005, this thesis helps to identify the challenges in the field and examine the methodological practices of English teachers. The study also aims to provide a view of the impact of some personal and social beliefs on students' learning, classroom participation. It also highlights the importance of both differentiated instruction and recognition of students' voice in guiding classroom research and classroom practice.

This study will make both academic and practical contributions. The main academic contribution is in providing understanding of classroom silence by using the voice of students in interpreting the practices of teachers, without pre-assuming a positive or negative role of silence in the setting.

It aims to offer practical recommendations that may help to establish effective communication between teachers and students through empowering students' voices in research and fostering differentiated instruction that recognises multiple forms of learning, including silent forms. It also recommends reviewing assessment practices in the setting and similar contexts. The research findings may therefore also be of use to educational authorities responsible for the planning and designing of the curriculum in Algeria and other contexts. Finally, the findings offer an insight into the broader challenges regarding the recognition and inclusion of different learning perspectives that may not align with conventional views regarding preferred forms of teaching and learning in EFL settings.

1.5. Algeria: Linguistic backgrounds and education

To better understand participants' experiences, and for a better contextualisation of the research findings, it is important to describe the socio-cultural and historical background of Algeria. This section includes the linguistic background of Algeria, which also provides background that relates to my participants, and the educational reforms in higher education sector where I describe the current teaching system and give a brief discussion of its claimed inadequacy in Algerian universities.

1.5.1. The linguistic background of Algeria

Algeria is situated in the northern part of Africa; its constitution considers Arabic and Tamazight the official languages and Islam the religion of the country. French is considered the first foreign language, followed by English as a second foreign language.

For daily communication, Algeria is considered 'a *de facto* diglossic community' (Djennane, 2014, p. 53). Algerians' everyday dialect is a blend of languages dominated by Arabic dialect, French, and varieties of Tamazight in addition to borrowed words from Spanish and Turkish. Standard Arabic thus is exclusively used in formal platforms along French, which has no constitutional stand, yet fulfils formal and official linguistic tasks. Formally, in scientific classrooms, French dominates the field, though there is a steady growth in the use of English, standard Arabic is mostly used in human and social sciences, and English is being mostly used in the departement of English language.

Many children attend Quranic schools where they start learning Standard Arabic and Quranic verses starting from the age of three. Due to the massive growth in the industry of private kindergartens, many children now come across French and English at a younger age. In formal schools, children start education at the age of five where they learn Standard Arabic, with French introduced in the third grade of primary school and English in the first year of middle school at the age of eleven. In a recent reform announcement in late 2021, the Minister of National Education agreed to introduce an hour per week of English to primary school pupils, starting from the second grade, for the next academic year 2022/2023.

In Algeria, learning and using English is seen as a way of opening new horizons for people and re-imagining their belonging away from the conflicted binary of Arabophone and Francophone (Jacob, 2019)

1.5.2. The LMD reform and the EFL situation in Algerian universities

This section intends to explain the higher educational system in Algeria. The university where this study was conducted follows the conventions of the LMD system.

In Algeria, there are currently three cycles for higher education qualifications, named the LMD system, which is part of the Bologna Process: Licence/ Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate. Its first implementation began in the academic year 2003-2004, however, its generalisation to all universities across Algeria took place in 2013. The LMD replaced the 'classical system' or the 'old' educational system. For a decade of trial, many academics claimed it to be a failure and inadequate for the Algerian context.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is applied for students to pass each academic year. In the first cycle of the Licence/ bachelor's degree, students must complete a minimum of 60 credits each academic year over the course of three years. The same applies to the second cycle of the Masters' degree. The students who do not complete the annual minimum credits have a chance to sit for a make-up exam. They retake the modules where they attained low grades to increase their credits. If they fail again, they will be considered in-debt, where they can still pass to the upper grade, but must re-attend those modules and sit for the exams again, or repeat the year The aim of the credit transfer system is to increase students' success (Sarnou et al., 2012). In this way, most students will be able to finish their studies in the appropriate time. The third cycle awards the Doctorate, there are no credits, however, students are selected based on their average of their marks throughout the two years of Masters, the categories are (A, B, C, D… etc). Sometimes, universities allow only students in category A and B to sit for doctorate exams. The exam in their domain specialty can be taken at any university in Algeria. When they pass the exam, they can start their PhD research for a period of three years.

Among the conventions of the LMD system, teachers have the possibility to develop the content of their pedagogical programs and are not obliged to follow the programs set by the Ministry, they are expected to adopt a learner-centred approach and conduct an ongoing assessment throughout the academic year, instead of relying solely on summative exams. Also, the Competency-based Approach (CBA) introduced by the Ministry is considered as the formal approach for teachers to use in their teaching and assessment.

Research studies in Algeria have reported that EFL academics perceive the pedagogical innovations prompted by the LMD system negatively and that university EFL teachers find difficulties in implementing these conventions in their classrooms (Azzi, 2012; Sarnou et al, 2012). Research also shows that students consider the teaching practices of their instructors to be influenced by the former classical system. They believe that assessment relies on rote learning and memory testing, instead of ideas extension and development. Students get quantitative assessment instead of qualitative assessment. Moreover, they regard the programmes (lessons content) the same as in the classical system and believe that learner-centredness cannot be adopted because of the over-crowded classrooms. (Hanifi, 2018).

In view of this, the implementation of the LMD system is still perceived unsuccessful after a decade. The number of teachers is increasing, but a lack of training for teachers to adapt to

these new pedagogies means that teachers maintain in their old practices. According to Miliani (2012), 'changes have been regularly initiated to improve existing methodologies and techniques, but these changes have operated only at surface level, since teacher training has been unsystematic and haphazard'. (p.220)

This brief description of the educational system in the setting is intended to aid the understanding of the findings and discussion in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

1.6. Terminology

In this section, I define and briefly discuss terms used in the thesis, namely silence and silent, classroom norms, classroom participation, assessment practices, learning environment, and engagement.

Silence and Silent

Although I discuss in detail different meanings of silence in section 2.2 and in section 2.3, I explain here what I mean by 'silence' in the classroom and by 'silent students' as these terms will be used differently by participants in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

I view silence as a state of minimum oral engagement in the classroom while the student is mentally engaged in the learning. Participants provided different meanings for silence because of their different experiences, with the meaning dependent on events or the learning situation.

The silent student thus is accorded the same description, a student who either voluntarily chooses to restrain from oral participation or finds him/herself obliged to remain silent, either out of respect for the classroom norms or because of some events occurring in the learning environment.

Classroom norms

The term 'classroom norms' is used to denote the accepted set of behaviours expected from students in the classroom. These norms include raising hands before speaking, asking for permission to move in the classroom, turn taking, forms of participation, using English to participate, and avoiding confrontation with teachers. Since most participants come from different towns of the same city, their learning histories and backgrounds may not be that different. Also, these classroom norms are not exclusive to university classrooms, but can be generalised to other pre-tertiary educational settings.

Forms of participation

By forms of participation, I refer to the approaches a student takes to show his/her engagement in learning. There are preferred forms of participation for students and for teachers alike. Forms of participation can range from voluntary oral participation, structured participation, engagement with peer or group work and providing written tasks to teachers for students who are unable to speak. This is mainly discussed in chapter six.

Classroom participation

Classroom participation in this study took the form of answering teachers' questions and prompts, taking turns to do tasks like reading passages or answering activities, raising hands to ask questions or provide further explanations or answers, and engaging in pair or group work activities inside the classroom. Although academically it can encompass different forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, I use the term to refer to participation that can be observed by an observer or a teacher.

Assessment practices

I use this term to refer to any practice entailing the evaluation of a student inside the classroom. In this thesis, assessment practices included summative assessment, grading students for tasks and participation, teacher-feedback, and peer-feedback.

Learning environment

The learning environment includes classroom norms, classroom participation, teacher behaviour and assessment practices. In this thesis, the learning environment represents the physical setting, which is EFL classrooms in the Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages, where the study is based. Each classroom has its own norms; therefore, the dynamics create different learning environments, though sharing the same setting. Also, it refers to informal classrooms, in particular the extra-curricular courses that students choose to take at university. An example of this is CEIL (Centre d'Enseignment Intensif des Langues) classrooms, as will be discussed in chapter five. Both formal and informal lessons can take place in one physical setting, hence, a classroom, however, since the norms and expectations are different, they are considered as two different learning environments.

1.7. Summary of Chapters

The remainder of the thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one has provided an overview of the topic, my background as a student of English and how I developed the focus of the thesis. It was followed by stating the research questions and potential contribution of the study. I then briefly outlined the linguistic background of Algeria and explained the higher educational system in Algeria.

Chapter two and three examine literature in the field. Chapter three presents theoretical backgrounds on silence, briefly reviews silence in the Algerian context, and provides a conceptual framework to be used for the analysis chapters. Chapter three reviews literature related to the language learner and the social, psychological and emotional challenges which influence their classroom participation.

Chapter four presents the methodological choices of the study. This chapter discusses the research paradigm, provides the rationale for the focused ethnography methodology and discusses the data collection methods: classroom observation, interviews, fieldnotes and students' diaries.

The findings of the study are presented over the next three chapters. Chapter five and six outline the findings regarding classroom silence, explore the patterns of participation within the classroom and report on the personal experiences and trajectories of the participants regarding the choices made for classroom participation. Therefore, different conceptualisations of classroom participation, forms of participation, and perceived influencing factors are described to present a full picture of the study. In Chapter Seven, I present the findings related to assessment and silence.

The final chapter synthesises and conceptualises the findings of the study, providing theoretical and pedagogical implications for teachers, students and institutions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Overview of silence

2. Introduction

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature that surrounds the concept of silence as a key element in both language and non-language classrooms. Generally, in language classes, the term 'silence' is often perceived negatively, indicating passiveness and introversion, as well as lack of interest, lack of ability and lack of self-confidence. For this reason, I provide an overall understanding of how the concept of silence is used in the context of the current study. I start section 2.1 by defining what silence is. I refer to reticence in the literature and explain my rationale for choosing to focus on silence. Section 2.2 deals with the concept of silence and its relationship with culture, including a brief overview about how silence is viewed and interpreted in the Arabic language and some Algerian educational contexts. In section 2.3, I discuss models for interpreting silence and reticence, both in informal settings and in the classroom. Finally, Section 2.4 discusses some of the functions of classroom silence and provides a brief review of pedagogical silence.

2.1. What is silence?

In this section, I describe my understanding of the existing research surrounding the concept of silence. As stated above, silence in the classroom usually has negative connotations, such as passiveness and lack of language competence. However, from a broader perspective, when silence is viewed through the lens of its cultural context, its role and significance can vary and sometimes it is highly esteemed. This section highlights various definitions from different disciplines on the concept of silence and reticence.

In many studies, especially those focusing on classroom research, the term 'reticence' is sometimes used to describe students who tend to remain silent in the classroom. Overall, studies into silence and reticence often have an interpretive nature, and they seek to disclose the meanings associated with silent behaviour, as well as its cultural significance and psychological triggers.

Following a number of studies, Bao (2019) provides a distinction between silence and reticence based on three key differences for each: motives, significance in an educational setting and their ongoing impact on language development. He reports from other studies mainly those of (Jaworski, 1993; Evans, 1996; Tsui, 1996) that silence is an indispensable layer of interaction and is a natural part of conversational skills. It is a mentally active period for the student to build language proficiency, and it can be a factor in successful communication. Reticence, on the other hand, tends to suggest subordination or a potential handicap in activating conversational skills. It is often identified as a learner's lack of ability in self-expression, and it can impede the development of communication skills. Although these distinctions might suggest a positive orientation towards silence and a negative one regarding reticence, Bao also adds that despite these distinctions, silence can also demonstrate breakdown in communication and other related negative traits. Therefore, both silence and reticence should be researched carefully, and uncovering their significance is always dependent on the context and individuals.

In this study, I tend to use the term 'silence' more often than 'reticence'. I do not make distinctions; silence and reticence are both be considered as behaviours entailing a withdrawal from oral communication in the classroom setting. It is worth noting that I continue to use 'reticence' if mentioned in original works.

Silence has often been defined as the absence of speech. Generally, when defining silence, speech is regarded as being on the opposite spectrum, and silence and speech are often considered two ends of a dichotomy (Eggins and Slade, 1997; Jaworski, 1993; Voegelin, 2010; Zou, 2002). Jaworski (1993) and Bao (2014; 2019, 2020) explain that silence and speech do not exist in total opposition to each other; instead, they complement each other. That means that both silence and speech have a function in language.

Most definitions about silence refer to its function within a situation or within a scope of study. For instance, when silence provides no function, it can be defined as an 'absence of noise' (Jaworski and Sachdev, 1998, p. 274). Regarding its other functions, its meanings can be distinct and varied. Dependency on the context and the particular interpretations of silence are of paramount importance for any research.

Keaten and Kelly (2000), whose work focused solely on the concept of reticence in communication, stated that, 'reticence refers to behaviour; individuals we refer to as reticent

are people who have a tendency to avoid communication, that is, to engage in chronic silence out of fear of foolishness.' (p. 168).

Their work is based on Philips's conceptualisation of reticence (1984, 1986,1997). They claim that reticent people avoid communication and remain silent to avoid embarrassment. They describe reticent individuals as incompetent communicators, who lack self-confidence because of the belief that good communicators can innately speak spontaneously and do not commit mistakes. They mention that reticent people experience social isolation. They are afraid of negative evaluations, and they dwell on their issue desperately. They refer to themselves as shy, they stigmatise others and engage in paradoxical thinking.

The belief that reticent or silent individuals are incompetent is also present in other works. For instance, Phillips (1997) believes that reticent individuals can have issues in a range of skills and tend to behave in one of four ways: 'First and foremost, they refrain from participating at all' (p. 131). Second, they, 'create a self-fulfilling prophecy of ineptitude' (p. 131), in which they regard their performance as weak and incompetent. The third behaviour is to engage in programmatic activity, relying on clichés or head-nodding. Lastly, some reticent individuals act nervously when speaking; they experience vocalised pauses and show hesitant speech.

In language teaching and learning, silence is sometimes seen as a lack of oral participation and engagement during learning tasks, and it might be associated with passivity (King, 2013). In his study, King uncovered the negative aspects of macro-level silence, which represents unresponsiveness, lack of oral engagement and avoidance of talk (ibid). Abdul Shakoor (2020, p. 1318) defines reticence in the classroom as, 'the learners' anxiousness, nervousness, and apprehension to speak in ESL classroom'.

Based on the previous definitions and studies, it becomes clear that silence is stigmatised as an issue towards effective communication. Reticent individuals are believed to experience a great deal of stress and anxiety. They are perceived as weak communicators and stereotyped as shy and lacking in self-confidence. In the classroom, it might be true that teachers develop a false belief about the lack of ability of their silent students because of their lack of communication and oral disengagement. This leads some teachers to constantly reward outspoken students and ignore silent ones (Reda, 2009; Warayet, 2011; Bao, 2014), and also the silent learners develop a mindset that it is useless to speak in their English class, thinking that teachers already perceive them to be incompetent (Donald, 2010). In addition, the high

expectation of teachers engenders frustration in learners' minds, and they tend to believe that they should always provide correct answers and speak with correct language (Jung, 2011, Abdul Shakoor, 2020). The above views regard reticence or silence as an impediment in the social and interactional skills of the individual.

My view of this is that students' reticence and silence can indeed be attributed to psychological factors and lack of knowledge. However, I believe that researching students' silence with regard to these factors can only restrict the possibility of identifying more holistic and/or individualised factors. In this study, personal learning experiences, individualistic interpretations of events and different learning environments seem to have a major influence on students' silence in the classroom.

Therefore, the premise that silence is not merely the absence of talk (Ollin, 2008) and is not restricted to the lack of communicative abilities (Bao, 2014) is the foundation of this study.

In the following section, I discuss the idealisation of talk and explain cultural stereotypes associated with silence. Silence is often connotated negatively because of cultural bias towards talk, especially in the teaching and learning context.

2.2. Silence and cultures of learning

In English language teaching, the Western view of TESOL is often claimed to be in favour of talk and oral participation of students. For instance, Blackshields et al., (2015) state:

> In western educational systems, oral and written communication has been assigned high value in that these are perceived of as providing evidence of teaching and learning, which is easily accessed by observers and which, in turn, determines how "good teaching" is described and evaluated. (p. 98)

This statement also supports the stereotype that Western students are more active and expected to be engaged and participating in classrooms more often than non-western students. Lausch (2018) thinks that the pedagogical partiality of western TESOL which is in favour of speech considers students who are silent as disengaged, disinterested, less prepared or less intelligent. Hao (2011) also believes that in western societies, voice is privileged over silence. On the other hand, learners from Confucian cultures are often perceived to be reticent in order to save face (King and Aono, 2017).

In the present study, I support the claim by Bao (2020) that, 'to hold on to students' cultural origins and deny students' ability to be flexible learners represents narrow-mindedness. It is

unhelpful to develop research designs based on stereotypical thinking.' (p. 189) Similarly, Armstrong (2007) conducted three years of ethnographic research that aimed at exploring the cultures of learning. He states: 'it is not merely a question of cultural difference and diversity, but an understanding of the classroom processes and interactions that contribute to the active construction of the meanings of silence in its classroom context' (p. 5). He emphasises the need to focus on the classroom construction of silence and its meanings within the context.

Talk and communication skills are often regarded with superiority in the classroom (Ollin, 2008). This bias toward talk ascribes silence as the odd behaviour in the classroom; silent students are regarded as passive and disengaged and talkative students as active and engaged. This belief is supported by modern approaches to learning, which overvalue dialogue, to the extent of considering learning to be restricted to its presence (Reda, 2010).

Since silence is often viewed as a cultural phenomenon, its significance depends on the people who use it or the *'value catalogue'* of that culture (Bao, 2014) and King (2011) argued that 'research into people's silent behaviour must be culture specific and must carefully consider the relative value of speech versus silence within that culture' (p. 31).

In brief, culture, social norms and situational context play a significant role in determining the value of both talk and silence. Harumi (1999) also believes that understanding the relationship between the target language culture and learners' own culture is a crucial part of foreign or second language learning.

What makes silence a complex phenomenon to study is the uniqueness of individuals' experiences, which sometimes diminishes cultural stereotypes. For instance, in a research study by Bao (2014) on East-Asian students studying in Australia, he found that students do not associate their Confucianism culture with their silent behaviour; they change their behaviour to meet their new learning environment. This proves the flexibility of learners and their ability to alter their behaviour to meet the needs of their learning environment. This can also be understood from the opposite viewpoint – a learner can become silent as a result of their new environment. This is found in Kang and Kim (2012) research which shows that international Korean students experienced a sense of inferiority when studying with American students which led them to be silent. Similar findings are found in Hseih (2007) narrative study on a Chinese student's experience in a US classroom where this student felt

invisible and 'useless' because she could not contribute to group discussions. The author argues that classroom settings, teachers and peers can disempower international students.

I believe that there is a need to review methodological views that state that students access learning through oral engagement and that cultural backgrounds or stereotypes can determine the learning of a student. Furthermore, in this study I refuse to categorise students as shy, introverted or less competent because of their silence in the classroom.

In a study by Canari and Macgregor (2008), they aimed to identify behaviours that differ between ideal, prototypical students, who they called 'alpha students', and their counterparts, 'beta students', who they called 'less than ideal', and whether these behavioural differences might predict students' communication competence in the classroom. The study focused on students, however, focus groups, and a survey were administered to teachers only. Results showed that teachers believe that ideal students are intellectually motivated and participative, and 'less than ideal' students are absent, confrontational and silent.

The challenging point regarding the aforementioned study is relying on the views and perceptions of teachers regarding students' silence and ignoring the perspective of students. Also, categorising students as 'ideal' and 'less than ideal' is, in my opinion, problematic, as this can cause friction between peers and affect the dynamics of the classroom.

Moreover, silence is not a classroom phenomenon that is solely dependent on a limited set of factors, such as lack of ability or challenging behaviour. The research findings of Soo and Goh (2013) challenge the above findings. In their research, 78 Malaysian university students used the Reticence Scale-12, which measures the level of reticence, taking into consideration six factors: anxiety, knowledge, timing, organization, skills and memory. Their findings reported that both highly proficient students and students with a low level of proficiency in English experience reticence in the classroom, notably because of anxiety and delivery skills. Their definition of reticence is the silent, non-participatory passive behaviour displayed by L2 learners due to their misconception that they lack the ability to speak. These results are also compatible with the studies mentioned previously in section 2.1., for example that of Abdul Shakoor (2020), who also found that students misjudge their level of competency.

The current research work is conducted in Algeria; therefore, it is important to contextualise the meanings of silence in the community. In the following, the literature available on silence in Arabic and other languages is used to explain the meaning of silence that may be present in society, and which can later help to explain the data. Also, due to the lack of studies on

silence in Algeria, I present my own beliefs regarding how silence is viewed and practised in the classroom.

2.2.1. Silence in Arabic and its value in Algerian schools

This section aims to give an overview of the meanings accorded to silence in the Algerian context. It starts with how silence is defined in Arabic, moving on to its value according to religious texts and then in educational settings in Algeria.

In Algeria, most of the moral and social practices of the Algerian people are primarily derived from the Islamic religion. Gerges (2014) states that 'Religion plays an important role in forming people's morals, social behaviours, and political thought in Algeria.' (p. 14)

In addition, Hiouani (2020) mentions, 'religion plays an important role in some of the values of the Algerian society which can make it somewhat difficult for many people to distinguish between what is religious and what is cultural' (p. 7).

In defining 'silence', a look at its meaning in Arabic and its religious value is important. In Arabic, there are two words that can be used to refer to a state of non-verbalism. Silence can be الصمت/saemt/, which has a spiritual courtesy meaning often associated with good manners, and also السكوت /suku:t/, which is a state of non-verbalisation and restraint from speech.

According to Al-Jahdhami (2018):

> Arabic distinguishes between two words that could possibly be used to refer to silence: *'sukoot'* and *'summt'*. *'Sukoot'* is silence after speech that is usually made out of one's own will. It is shorter in duration and it is a type of negative silence since it is refraining from expressing something true or false. *'Summt'*, on the other hand, is no talk at all and is usually by one's own will and is longer in duration than *'sukoot'*. It is regarded as positive silence since it is refraining from expressing something foolish, trivial or untrue. (p. 1472)

Silence is mentioned in the Islamic texts several times, often denoting a positive meaning and is not the opposite of talking. Many hadiths of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) are taught to children at a young age, such as 'whoever is silent has been saved'[1], which denotes

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[1] This statement is said by Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) and is considered authentic, according to El-Albani, and mentioned in Islamic books that gather the Prophet's sayings. This hadith is mentioned in Sunan al-Tirmidhi #2501, Ahmed #6481 and Tabrani in his book Elkabeer #113.

being safe from the countless calamities of language, and another hadith that says, 'May Allah have mercy on a person who spoke rightly and was rewarded, or who was silent and remained safe'. It can be argued that silence as /saemt/ is seen as a means of avoiding negative judgements, hurting others with words and being saved from problems arising from misunderstandings.

In education, silence is perceived differently. Ali ibn Abi Talib, a famous Islamic figure and Caliph said[2]:

> There is no good in silence when it comes to knowledge, just as there is no good in speaking when it comes to ignorance.

When it comes to teaching and learning in Algeria, several societal and cultural norms come to the surface. In primary education, children are used to hearing, 'If talk is silver, silence is golden.' In middle and secondary schools, students are expected to ask for permission before speaking, and silent students, who rarely participate but maintain good behaviour, are seen as well-mannered students. Miliani (2008) claims that teachers are often seen as authoritative figures in the same way as *Elcheikh[3]* in Quranic schools or *Kutab[4]*. Silence in these setting is always attributed positive connotations and silent people are perceived wise and respectful.

At university level, these conventions become paradoxical. On the one hand, many studies claim that learner-centredness is being promoted by the new reforms in Algeria as mentioned in section 1.5.2. which means students are encouraged to actively engage and manage their learning. In EFL classrooms, students are expected to practice the language in order to develop communicative competence. Their oral participation is often marked, and their silence may be considered a lack of engagement. With this in mind, the expectations in the EFL classroom can contrast the socio-cultural norms of teaching and learning already existing in society. Therefore, students' silence can be misinterpreted and perceived as lack

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[2] A statement made by Imam Ali, mentioned in Tafsir Al-Kabir by Imam Fakhr Al-din Al-Razi.

[3] *Elcheilkh* means 'the old man' in Arabic. It is the label used for teachers in Quranic schools and also sometimes used to call teachers in state schools.

[4] *Kuttab* is a name used to refer to primary education in the Islamic world. Nowadays, it is associated with Quranic schools, where children can learn the Arabic alphabet, writing, Quran and Tafseer (interpretation of Quranic verses), based on their level.

of ability or disengagement and in other negative ways. On the other hand, both teachers and students find themselves attached to these cultural constructs, which makes it harder for a teacher to cede control to a student and for students to become independent and establish their agency through leading the teaching and learning practices.

In what follows, I will elaborate on how the concept of silence is understood in the classroom. I will start by drawing on its broad interpretation and then its interpretation in language classes, as well as its functions. Then I will discuss the concept of pedagogical silence, which according to many researchers, is a facilitative form of learning.

2.3. Interpreting silence

In this section, I shall explain the work of Kurzon (1998) on intentional and unintentional silence in question-answer adjacency pairs; the work of Jaworski (1993) on the power of silence in which he rejects the essentialist notion of silence as being opposed to speech; Nakane (2007) on silence in intercultural communication where she suggests certain forms and functions of silence, the modal of reticence of Kelly and Keaten (2000), and, finally, the conceptualisation of silence in the language classroom by King (2013).

2.3.1. Kurzon (1998): Intentionality of silence

Firstly, Kurzon (1998) positions his work within a semiotic framework and, similar to King (2011; 2013), it emphasises the importance of context to determine the meanings of silence. Kurzon believes that 'for silence to have meaning in the linguistic sense, the speaker must have an intention – hence a zero signifier has an utterable signified, a meaning that can be expressed by words' (p. 8).

In other words, when a person refrains from speech by withholding their words or ideas for certain reasons, it suggests that the silence is meaningful because it is intentional. On the other hand, Kurzon (1998) continues, 'but when the speaker has no intention behind his or her behaviour, we may refer to this silence as unintentional and therefore as linguistically meaningless' (p. 8), or as Berger (2004) refers to it, 'involuntary speechlessness'.

Jaworski (1993, p. 34) also supports this claim when he states, 'the actual interpretation of someone's silence takes place only when the communication process is expected or perceived to be taking place'. He believes that not all types of silence are communicative in nature; therefore, they might not have a communicative function.

In the same line of thought, the modal suggested by Kurzon (1998) regarding the ability and inability to speak is important for language teaching and learning researchers. He believes that lack of ability to speak can be due to a lack of knowledge or psychological inhibitions, for instance feeling anxious, embarrassed or 'tongue-tied'[5] (p. 33), which are common factors often referred to in research about students' silence in language classrooms.

Kurzon believes that silence caused by psychological variables and lack of knowledge is considered unintentional as the person has no control over their action. Intentional silence, however, results from, 'a genuine choice made by the addressee and may be verbalised through a speech act... e.g., "I will not talk" (p. 36), or 'a deliberate attempt by the addressee not to be cooperative with the addresser' (Kurzon, 1995, p. 55). Nakane (2007) uses the same distinction and refers to intentional silence as avoidance of confrontation and unintentional silence as 'extreme second language anxiety' (p. 97).

These distinctions are important to understand, whether the speaker (the student) is using silence to convey resistance by consciously taking the decision to remain silent, or the individual is unwillingly silent for some uncontrollable factors.

For silence with and without knowledge, Kurzon (1998) provides this illustration:

> The silent addressee may know or not know the answer to the question s/he is being asked. If s/he knows, then there are two possible responses – verbal response as the cooperative way of responding to a question, or silence. Which is uncooperative, to say the least. If, on the other hand, the addressee does not know the answer, s/he has also the possibility of two ways of responding – by saying I don't know, or by keeping silent. I have claimed that since people are often embarrassed when they have to reveal their ignorance, they can hide this ignorance behind a wall of silence in situations where they are not forced to speak. A pupil sitting at the back of the class often plays this game. (p. 38)

So, based on this illustration, silence can simply be deemed to be recognised as ignorance; in situations where teachers have large classes and demanding curriculums, they may skip or pass the silent student to another one who is more willing to talk.

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[5] This expression exists also in Arabic. Usually, it is used to describe children who start speaking late. It also means someone who is unable to articulate properly either because of malformity in speech organs or when being extremely anxious and shy. Sometimes, when someone refuses to talk or answer, the addresser uses this expression to describe the silent addressee.

These distinctions are based on dyadic interactions where two individuals are involved in the spoken exchanges. In classrooms, this might be applicable mainly in teacher-centred classes, where students are expected to respond after being chosen by the teacher or when it is their turn to participate. In other classes, mainly those based on open-discussions and student-centredness, these distinctions can also be used to understand the intentionality of the students' silence.

Similarly, when interpreting silence, Jaworski (1993) states that 'silence and speech do not stand in total opposition to each other but form a continuum of forms ranging from the most prototypical instances of silence to the most prototypical instances of speech.' (p. 34). Drawing on this statement, silence may range from the complete absence of sound and thoughts, which may bear no meaning at all, to other extending categories like speaking and avoiding certain topics, which, according to Jaworski, is a type of silence. He mentions in another work 'an absence of something that we expect to hear on a given occasion, when we assume it is "there" but remains unsaid' (Jaworski, 2000, p. 113). A similar type of silence mentioned by Kurzon (2007) is 'thematic silence'. He argues that 'in thematic silence, a person when speaking does not relate to a particular topic' (p. 1677). In other words, when an individual in a discussion speaks and consciously takes the decision to refrain from mentioning subjects, or states particular opinions, its significance lies in its intentionality and the purpose for maintaining it.

2.3.2. Nakane (2007): an analytical model for interpreting silence

This description relates to a study by Nakane (2007) on Japanese students studying overseas. She claims that, for Japanese students, disagreement with the lecturer is highly face-threatening, so students tend to use silence as the 'super strategy' to save face and avoid a face-threatening act. She concludes that Japanese students' silence is not merely due to difficulties of adapting to Australian classroom norms but is influenced by a moral position of showing respect and politeness. Thus, students' silence can be interpreted as avoidance of confrontation rather than acceptance of what the teacher is saying. Thematic silence can also be seen as a strategy for students to maintain face, avoid negative judgement and show respect.

Nakane categorises silence into two levels: macro and micro. She starts from the very small units of silence that occur in speech like pauses, lapses and gaps, and extends it to the macro

level, where individuals choose to withdraw from speech for reasons such as courtesy, attending religious events or being oppressed due to political organisations.

Micro-level silences are relevant to conversation analysis research as her other studies mainly focus on silence in police interviews. Macro-level silences are inclusive. They cover situational factors, learning environments and cultural backgrounds. In her study focusing on silence in inter-cultural communication, Nakane presents an analytical multi-layered model for interpreting silence, inspired by her findings from ethnographic interviews, micro-ethnographic studies and research into the ethnography of communication. This two-dimensional model integrates the three domains of linguistics, socio-psychology and cognition and takes account of different levels of social organisations: individual, situational and socio-cultural.

The linguistic domain contains, among other things, preferred participation structure, language competence and participants' orientation to turn-taking. Then, socio-psychological factors include personality, perception of self and others, and politeness with its associated threat of face. Finally, the cognitive domain includes knowledge schema, topics and the wait-time needed for processing.

These factors can be applicable to any learning context. Psychological inhibitors, socio-psychological backgrounds and language competence are always at the core of research about students' silence, (see section 3.3.)

2.3.3. Keaten and Kelly (2000): A modal of reticence

Another modal of six components that explains reticence was developed by Keaten and Kelly (2000). It includes need, perceived incompetence, helplessness, anxiety, devaluation, and withdrawal, and the model is not sequential or linear. In the following lines, I explain the model in relation to reticent students.

First, reticent students are aware of the *need* to communicate and participate in order to achieve their learning goals and develop their language competence. However, due to their fear of negative evaluation and *perceived incompetence*, they avoid taking part in communicative tasks. The authors further explain that 'given that avoiding communication prevents individuals from practising and refining their skills, it seems reasonable to assert that reticents are less competent communicators than non-reticents.' (p. 170). So, students who believe

that they lack ability and perceive themselves as less competent tend to remain silent and withdraw from participation.

The third component of the reticence model is *helplessness.* This refers to the learners' belief about their lack of control over a situation due to previous failures. It is also an outcome of recurrent perception that the result of a certain stressful circumstance is not related to the practice of a person in that circumstance.

Reticent students believe that good communicators can speak spontaneously and impulsively without planning, rehearsing, and/or committing mistakes. This belief, according to the authors, makes students feel that they are lacking competence, and they eventually experience helplessness.

Learners' expectations about communication lead them to develop a feeling of *anxiety* (see section 3.3.1), which leads them to *devalue* the importance of speaking, causing them to follow the *withdrawal* pattern, which means learners avoid putting themselves in situations that require them to speak (Keaten and Kelly, 2000) or can be expressed as avoiding to take risks in the classroom (see section 3.3.4).

Given that the data collected for this study also features the existence of many of these attributes, it could be said that all the six components of the reticent model – perceived incompetence, helplessness, anxiety, devaluation and withdrawal – act as the root factors that contribute to students' silence in the language classroom.

2.3.4. King (2011): Conceptions of silence

Taking a more focused stance, King (2011; 2013) reported five different conceptions of silence in the classroom. His research into Japanese university students' silent behaviour revealed that silence identified in the classroom is *the silence of disengagement* often found in situations where the teacher dominates the classroom. Students are inattentive, passive, bored and do not engage in talk unless it is directed to them specifically. *The silence of teacher-centred methods* is linked to the previous one. This type of silence is mainly caused by poor choices or lack of awareness of the pedagogical techniques of teaching. King believes that the entrenched beliefs of the grammar-translation approach minimise students' opportunities to actively engage in the classroom. *The silence of non-verbal activities* is present when students are engaged with either a listening, writing or silent-reading task. King does not consider this type of silence as a threat towards language development; however,

the amount of time students take to perform these kinds of tasks can mean that fewer opportunities are given to oral tasks. *The silence of confusion* occurs mainly when students are given less time to cognitively process the L2 input. King claims that confusion may result because of incomprehensible teacher talk, students' low level, and unfamiliarity with the tasks. King noted that students may employ confusion to manifest their non-acceptance of a system. Finally, with *the silence of salient cliques*, King explains the tendency for Japanese students to be part of a group. A mindset deeply rooted in the Japanese community favours communism over individualism. The salient cliques referred to in his study are groups of students that share the same interests, like sport for example. Their communication is restrained to in-group talks, and they refuse the out-group ones.

These types proved to be apparent in Japanese university second-language classrooms due to the lack of student-initiated talk, repeated listening activities, long off-task breaks and a lack of oral participation.

To sum up, my understanding of the various occurrences that emerged in my study was mainly based on previous interpretations. Interpreting silence is first based on the intentionality of the individual. Connotations then can be attributed to whether the person is using silence to convey a meaning, or the silence is meaningless because of knowledge deficiency or psychological inhibitors.

To include a broader framework for silence, thematic silence does not necessarily require the speaker to be silent; a speaker can talk and avoid certain topics, share opinions or confront the addressee. This is of particular importance in contexts where power distance and power relations are evident.

In language classrooms and this study in particular, the above interpretations provide a starting point for understanding students' classroom silence. They are holistic and can be applied in different language-learning settings. In this study, the meaning associated with silence and perceptions regarding silent students proved to be distinct for each participant. Therefore, the interpretative nature of the current study looks at individual experiences and personal attributions towards the meanings and interpretations of silence in the EFL classroom. This seems to be lacking in the literature; only a few recent studies have discussed the individual experiences of students regarding classroom silence.

In the following section, I discuss the functions of silence in a classroom setting and elaborate on the concept of pedagogical silence, which is advocated for by some scholars to be facilitative for the language learner.

2.4. Functions of Silence

As discussed above, silence must be distinguished between intentional and unintentional as well as communicative and non-communicative.

Nakane (2007) states that there are multiple functions of silence: cognitive, discursive and social.

Cognitive functions are explained as the pauses a person performs in speech and hesitations when a person engages cognitively in language processing. Discursive functions are used in marking boundaries in discourse. Finally, according to Nakane, social functions of silence include:

- o Negotiating and maintaining social distance
- o Impression management through pause length, frequency and speed of talk
- o Conversational styles through pause length, frequency, speed of talk and overlapping
- o Means of social control through avoiding verbal interaction with specific individuals
- o Means of maintaining power through avoiding certain content or verbal expressions
- o Means of maintaining and reinforcing power in a relationship
- o Means of negotiating power
- o Politeness strategies

It is apparent that the social functions of silence surpass the other functions probably as they are more apparent in day-to-day interactions and involve other individuals in the process. It is worth mentioning that these functions are holistic and explain silence as part of human communication in a general way; therefore, a classroom as a small unit of social interaction may comprise these silence functions and probably others that are not mentioned in Nakane's study.

Likewise, Schultz (2009) suggests five functions of silence that can be found together in a classroom setting.

Silence as resistance is often portrayed as refusing to comply or to get involved in a learning task or an activity. If this form is collaboratively manifested, then an egalitarian and

democratic interference is needed in the classroom to allow space for different views and perspectives.

Schultz explains *silence as power* as the power to decide when and where to talk. She claims that this form is often performed by students who are both engaged and disengaged: engaged in their inner thoughts about the discussion, on the one hand, and disengaged from vocal participation, on the other.

Silence as protection is mostly viewed by teachers as a form of resistance and stubbornness. However, it is often employed by students as a defensive strategy to protect aspects of their private lives from the public. Schultz suggests that silence can also be seen as the voice of students; therefore, teachers should understand first how and why students choose to remain silent and then work on ways to build a trusting relationship to encourage them to express themselves.

Silence as response to trauma is viewed from the perspective of students who may have experienced traumatic events in their lives and so find themselves unable to articulate that into words. This form of silence, according to Schultz, 'is an active and strategic choice rather than as a passive response' (p. 48).

Finally, *silence as a time and space for creativity* is explained as the time needed for a student to process ideas and thoughts. The pace of learning differs from one student to another; some students need time and space to reflect and sometimes to verbalise their ideas in writing before being able to vocalise them. However, rapid-paced classrooms seem to deprive this category of students by rewarding students who can answer quickly.

2.5. The pedagogical function of silence

There is an emerging trend towards correcting misunderstandings about classroom silence and fostering teaching approaches that can enable teachers and students to benefit. I should first note that when silence impedes students' progress, it is considered as problematic, as stated by Keaten and Kelly (2000):

'Reticence is classified as problematic when a person's silence impairs his or her ability to reach goals because he or she worries about being perceived as foolish. Thus, individuals we refer to as reticent experience problematic reticence.' (p. 169)

Kim et al. (2016) argue that oral participation is not the only form of learners' engagement, and that silence is also a form of participation. Similarly, Wang and Moskal (2019) suggest

that intentional silence could be seen as a pedagogy, they reported on the experience of two of their participants who willingly disengaged from verbal interactions and could achieve good grades. In order to identify whether silence can be used to promote student learning, Ollin (2008) suggests and emphasises the importance of observation for teachers to know whether student learning is taking place through the silent episodes, or students are silent because they are struggling with their learning.

According to Bao (2014), 'silence needs to be guided through as a pedagogically informed and well-designed task for it to become productive.' (p. 14) For this reason, several pedagogical uses of silence have been identified and encouraged in formal learning settings. According to findings by Ollin (2008), students may benefit from space and time given to them for private reflection to develop their own ideas without the intrusion of other voices.

Bao (2014) found that a group of Australian students considered processing comprehension, developing thoughts, formulating responses, articulating sounds in the head and rehearsing imagined interaction as silent modes of language learning. He also claims that, unlike being forced into a mode by the teacher, when students select the most suitable approach for their learning, the true essence of learner-centeredness can be reached. In addition to this, giving students the opportunity to choose when to speak 'on their own terms' will grant them a sense of autonomy (Reda, 2009).

In the same vein, Zembylas and Michaelides (2004, p. 205) adopt a similar approach, claiming that 'educators have the responsibility to create a safe place for our students by valuing silence and by incorporating into our classrooms the time and space necessary to experience the pedagogical values of silence'. This view, as argued earlier, considers silence as a useful and meaningful pedagogical opportunity in the classroom. Similarly, Lausch (2018) suggests the concept of mindful silence, in a similar way to pedagogical silence. She believes that:

> Mindful silence draws on the scholarship of mindfulness, conscious communication and perceptive silent listening. It invites learning from and with other individuals, through silence and listening, and should be considered as a meaningful addition to enhance the outcomes of teaching and learning. (p. 63)

In a recent study, Bao and Thanh-My (2020) conducted a qualitative-quantitative case study where they tried to discover the perspectives of 239 Vietnamese university students regarding the effects of their silence on the formulation and quality of their talk.

The results showed a balance between silent thinking and verbal contribution. Silence appears to be useful for speech as if it is employed more proactively rather than viewed passively in the learning process, it is considered as a form of engagement. Their findings also support the claim that silence has a closer relationship with talk than people often think and that silent rehearsal might lead to a delay until students feel ready to speak in front of others, which requires teachers to be tolerant and patient.

From these views, it can be claimed that letting students work in the way they feel more comfortable may grant the true essence of autonomy and learner-centeredness. In other words, silence can be a form of learning when its value is evident for the student and the teacher.

2.6. Conclusion

In this overview of some of the leading studies of silence I have attempted to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of silence with regard to students' learning. I first aimed to show that there is always a discrepancy in views when it comes to studying and researching silence. Silence and reticence are viewed differently with more negativity ascribed to reticence than that of silence. The cultural and psychological aspects have always been at the core of these studies. Then my second objective was to set the background of certain themes that I find important for me to explain the perceptions of silent students and their teachers later in analysis chapters. To summarise, this chapter emphasised the need to consider both speech and silence as two communicative acts existing in a continuum, and that silence may have a pedagogical value which can facilitate learning.

With this in mind, in the following chapter I turn my attention to silence and the language learner. Specifically, I attempt to outline some of the complex factors which are attributed to students' silence in the language classroom.

Chapter Three

Silence, the classroom, and the language learner

3. Introduction

Research in the area suggest that there are many reasons affecting students' oral engagement. I showed earlier in chapter two that talk generally has a privilege over silence in many contemporary classrooms; as a result, challenges may occur with respect to evaluating students based on their oral performance as a criterion for their engagement and learning.

Accordingly, Harumi (2001) claimed that explanations as to why students are silent are rarely thought by teachers to be simple as they adopt stereotypical characteristics of passivity and lack of collaboration. Besides this, the psychological and emotional attributes are found to have a great impact on students' silence. According to King (2013), silence maybe employed by students as a "risk-free" choice to avoid embarrassment and save their face. Moreover, students become more resistant when feeling forced to speak (Remedios et al., 2008; Saylag, 2014; Bao, 2014) and too much of unfamiliarity with the vocabulary used by the teacher make students lose their attention (Saylag, 2014, Bao, 2014).

In the same line of thought, Aghazadeh & Abedi (2014) found that lack of lexis, mispronunciation and problems with turn taking are considered major reasons contributing to students' silence in addition to the affective and personality factors like lack of confidence, lack of motivation, anxiety and introversion/extroversion. The external factors causing students to be either reticent or silent may go further to include teachers' instructional strategies, which Bao (2014, p. 50) refers to as 'teachers' flawed professionalism', notably: being teacher-centred, not respecting students' right to have individual opinions, and showing little interest in students' social needs, little tolerance of errors in students' answers, unequal distribution of talk turns, lack of wait time, and negligence towards students' ability and interest.

Hence, the complex nature of silence requires a clear understanding of its reasons on both the contextual and individual levels. Following this, an review of possible factors that contribute to students' participation, oral engagement and disengagement in the classroom

setting are discussed in the following order: Section 3.2 covers the external factors attributed to classroom silence. It discusses group dynamics, rapport between teachers and students and turn-taking. Section 3.3. deals with some of the internal factors which are mostly psychological such as self-confidence, anxiety, willingness to communicate, risk-taking and finally investment in learning.

Many studies consider students' related factors are those that language learners bring with them to the particular learning situations including motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, and personality trait. On the other hand, external factors are those that characterize the particular language-learning situation including teacher's attitude and teaching styles and course related factors like class size and classroom activity.

In her study on Japanese students in a multicultural context, she explained peer group pressure and individual differences such as age, gender, learning strategies, the learning environment, teaching methodology and socio-cultural differences are all congruent reasons for students' silence.

3.1. Classroom dynamics

In the classrooms, students are expected to be members who respect the norms and provide a value for the group. Norms in this sense are agreeable rules that must be followed by members of the group. They can either be imposed by the teacher, the school, or even higher authorities and in most fortunate situations they are constructed through a democratic process where both students and teachers form the group norms (Dorneiy & Murphy, 2003). However, not all students can feel that they belong to the group and thus they start negotiating their membership which may lead to not abiding by the classroom norms.

Wang, et al., (2022) research on students' silence in in intercultural classrooms reported the case of a student negotiating her membership in two study groups. This student was described as high achieving and was a member of many verbally active students' groups. However, her experience changed once she joined other optional courses where she struggled to enact her agency and started feeling inferior to other students who seemingly knew how to ask questions and lead discussions. Her new membership in the group made her mostly silent because she felt that the peers and the instructors were indifferent about her silence. Accordingly, silent students in her new groups who shared a similar experience

ended up having 'a quiet corner' (p. 608) or their own small silent group within a highly talkative group. She reported that the instructor putted blame on them for not participating and peers viewed them incompetent because they were not adding a value to the group. Eventually, she and the other silent students remained in that situation for a whole semester.

Such an experience shows that students can struggle to engage within a group and abide by its norms. This can be mostly found in international classrooms where the norms can change drastically for students. But for this particular student, she was orally engaged in other groups and was a member of verbally active students which can only explain her silence as a result of the poor relationship she developed in the group. This led them to develop a small group of quiet students who do not participate. In view of this, a classroom dynamic can be affected by either a person or behaviour getting appraisal over others. Respectively, teachers who perceive silence negatively, their silent students may feel underprivileged compared with the eloquent students. Dominant students may shape the culture of the classroom by asserting authority over their counterparts, and learner reticence can be constituted by the perception, attitude, and behaviour of peers, teachers and the reticent students themselves (Bao, 2014).

In the same line of thoughts, the silent students may become more conserved and or may push themselves out of the silent-safe zone to improve their status according to the social convention of the classroom. In this vein, talk maybe seen as an overt social commitment to the group that talkative students impose on their silent peers (Ollin, 2008) and students who are unable to contribute orally maybe conceived by themselves and their peers as 'failures' in the collaborative context (Remedio. et al, 2008).

Group dynamics can also be impacted by collective silence. King (2011) found that 'salient cliques' were apparent in most ESL Japanese university classrooms. He claimed that cliques share the same patterns of group participation and can be 'effective at inhibiting and silencing learners' (p, 116). One powerful clique in his study dominated and settled the tone of the lesson, they refused to respond to the teachers' questions and prompts, were totally unresponsive, and contempt their peers who make L2 mistakes. In a nutshell, this clique created a total discomforting learning atmosphere, and considered their behaviour as a form of "teamwork to make silence".

The existence of such cliques within a group impact negatively the atmosphere of the classroom. The negative impact of a small clique that has norms on the individual as well as on the whole learning environment is apparent and the same effect may be considered when

dynamics of the group has flaws. Therefore, according to Dornyei & Malderez (1997) 'awareness of classroom dynamics may help teachers establish firm footing, that is, create learning environments where language learning is rewarding and therefore efficient experience'. (p,65).

Other ways are to consider the classroom as a community, the more this community interacts together, shares ideas and knowledge, the more it develops, grows and makes learning as an active process of co-constructing knowledge (Williams, Mercer, & Ryan, 2015). Understanding the social process of group formation and interaction may lead to better management and effective interference when necessary. I mentioned that group dynamics is defined through the relationships and interactions between group members. Often the teacher is regarded as the social referent for the students on how to build relationships and deal with the other (Hendrickx.et al, 2016). However, teachers sometimes manifest their attitudes or favours regarding certain forms of interaction and learning (Bao, 2014) and they ostracise other forms which may not abide by their teaching and learning beliefs. This leads to poor quality relationships which is discussed in the following section.

3.1.1. Classroom Rapport

Rapport in the classroom is an important element that shapes the overall classroom dynamics. In this study, rapport between silent students, their teachers and peers proved to be of high importance in the way silent students represented their silence. It is important to provide a review about the importance of rapport for students and for maintaining a positive learning environment.

Students regard teachers to be of high quality when they are caring, empathetic and proving professional skills, this can make better teachers, students that are more devoted and an overall positive teacher–student relationship (Kermad & Kang, 2018). On this regard, teachers who are less caring tend to ignore and embarrass their students, favour certain learners over the others and rarely smile or show an empathetic behaviour to the students (Mouhoubi-Messadh, 2017). As a result, students may resort to silence as their safe zone where they hide their fear of their teachers' reactions towards their mistakes. Fear of teacher is often perceived as threat towards positive classroom atmosphere (King, 2013). In the same line of thought, researchers highlight that teachers' lack of emotional control is at the core of negative relationships formed with students and these can affect negatively those

relationships and cause withdrawal behaviours (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight, 2009). Withdrawal behaviours can have different forms, from escaping classes, resistance to do tasks, or resisting engagement and participation in the classroom.

Therefore, researchers put emphasis on the need for teachers to be equipped with stress, anxiety, annoyance and anger control, and also with conflict resolution and effective communication skills (Bıçak and Yöndem, 2008). Learning about students' personal profiles and backgrounds may make it easier for teachers to launch and develop that rapport. A positive teacher–student relationship creates 'a comfortable space for more learning opportunities, allowing students to increase their participation in the classroom …which ultimately leads to higher achievement' (Nguyen, 2007, p. 285).

However, some teachers may believe that breaking their authority profile may lead to behavioural problems. Linsin (2011) believes that a positive rapport is rewarding for both parties, however, challenges and classroom management issues may occur like lack of respect and listening to the teacher, challenging students, accountability failing, and students taking punishments personally.

In classroom, when students experience a number of aspects like trust, mutual respect, and appraisal, they start to feel secure. According to Prindiville, (1967) 'when the student experiences a sense of security, he begins to grow' (p. 3). It might be argued that security can serve as a premise for students to open to their teachers about their insecurities and areas of weaknesses which includes their reasons for silence.

In the case of silent students, teachers who necessitate oral participation in their practice may regard silence as resistance to their approach. Therefore, bridging the hole of miscommunication can be served by fulfilling students with security to express their reasons and learning preferences. Moreover, language teachers need to create an inclusive and friendly classroom environment in which students feel safe to initiate dialogue and are not afraid to make mistakes (Aida, 1994; Tsui, 1996). In the same vein, unbalanced power distribution in the classroom can make some students feel insecure. Hence, teachers should be aware of ways to empower all their students to have equal opportunities to participate in learning tasks (Williams, Mercer, Ryan, 2015). This is highlighted in the following section.

3.1.2. Turn-Taking

Recently, several studies have raised the pedagogical concerns of turn-taking in classroom context, notably (Karas, 2016; Ingram and Elliot, 2014; Xie, 2011; Waring, 2013). It is argued that equal turn distributions between students maximise the student talking time and raise more opportunities for language use. Tsui (1996) also argued that silence in the classroom can be a result of the conversation turns are not evenly arranged and allocated.

Mehan (1979) proposed three ways of which students get involved in a teacher-fronted classroom, either by nomination, invitation to bid or invitation to reply. Allwright (1980) further extends the framework by including stealing a turn, interrupting, and missing a turn. This section discusses turn-taking in relation to students and how limited opportunities can limit their oral engagement. Many silent students are in fact eager to engage orally when feeling secure as mentioned previously. However, when unequal turn distribution, or peer domination occur, their willingness to talk can be diminished.

Each classroom is unique and may develop its own interaction patterns and preferences as mentioned previously in section 3.2. Therefore, turn-taking distribution may not be practiced following the pattern of equal opportunities that ensures that all students have the same share for participation. Wang, et al., (2022) mentioned that a participant felt that she does not have the time to process and prepare for the answer because of her peers provided quicker answers. This led her to feel incompetent and then silent. Such experiences shows that some students dominate speaking opportunities (Allwright, 1980) while others miss them (Ellwood and Nakane, 2009). On the same token, in such a situation, some students who regularly miss or lose their opportunity to speak by someone taking over them, may become silent participants either voluntarily or forced by the behaviour of their peers.

Karas (2016) developed an ad hoc instrument combining six categories of turn-taking possibilities inspired by the works of (Mehan, 1979 and Allwright, 1980). His study investigated turn-taking and silent learning during open class discussions of an EAP class gathering students with different backgrounds: 3 Angolan males, Chinese females and 1 chinese male. The categories are as follow: *Teacher open-solicitation:* when students are invited to comment or ask questions without being nominated by the teacher. *Teacher nominates specific student:* this category includes both a teacher self-selects a student or by a student volunteering to respond. *Teacher nominates group:* generally, appears in group work when the teacher nominates a group and the group select one student to present them. *Student-to-student:* when a student addresses another student in discussion. *Student*

interrupts teacher: the student takes over the teachers in order to speak. *Student interrupts student:* the student takes over another student in order to speak. (Karas, 2016, p. 15-16)

The interaction patterns above present conglomeration of turns dynamics manifested by the teacher and students. Following the aforementioned, Karas found that teacher open-solicitation was the most taken turn by students, however, their answers were very short and brief. The longest in terms of speaking was "teacher nominates a group" because enough time was given to the students to work, discuss and prepare what to say when the teacher asks for the response. In addition to this, the least number of turns was recorded in "student-to-student" i.e. a student addressing another one without interruption. This study also revealed an unequal turn distribution between students, the Angolan students were very dominant in teacher open-solicitation" and were interrupting both the teacher and other students, however, the Chinese students were humbly engaging in the discussion in "teacher open-solicitation" with zero instances of interruption. Thereafter, in the same study, two Chinese students considered the patterns of interaction of the Angolan students as impeding their opportunities to talk by allowing no time for thinking and organizing their thoughts.

The behaviour described above serves as concurrent factor for students' silence. Stealing ones' turn, interrupting to take over, or over dominating the open turns may create dominant powers if not interfered by the teacher. On the one hand, some individual students, or salient cliques may start building an interaction dynamic that can become after several practices the norm of the classroom participation. On the other hand, these behaviours can supplement some students' lack of self-confidence and tendency to avoid engaging with class discussion. Therefore, it is very important for the teacher to be aware of the patterns of turn-taking happening in the classroom, assure no differential treatment to students' contribution and to pledge fair opportunities for all parties.

3.2. Psychological factors of students' silence

In any study about classroom silence, the psychological variables prove to have an important role in interpreting the silence of students. In this study, I consider the psychological factors to be adding to the complexity of students' silence, but they are not referred to as much as other contextual factors. Therefore, the following review provides only a brief reference to some of the widely discussed psychological inhibitors related to students' silence.

In discussing psychological affects in language learning, it is important to refer to Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Model, notably: anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation. He hypothesised that negative emotions "affect" constraint language development by blocking comprehensible input from reaching the learner's mind; in this case the filter is high. Conversely, positive emotions facilitate the learning process; meaning, the filter is lowered. In the following I provide brief review from the literature on the different affects which are directly linked to students' silence and oral disengagement from the classroom interactions. I start with foreign language anxiety in section 3.3.1., then willingness to communicate in section 3.3.2, self-confidence in 3.3.3. then finally risk-taking in 3.3.4.

3.2.1. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

FLA has received a lot of attention within the field of language learning (Williams, Mercer & Ryan, 2015). In this study, anxiety is associated with feelings of fear of negative judgement, fear of evaluation and fear of embarrassment.

Anxiety usually denotes feelings of nervousness while using a foreign language. Learners feel required to perform the language which they are still in the process of acquiring it. As a result, self-concept may be challenged and questioned as they may feel that they are not presenting their true-self or personality which may result in students' anxiety and which can lead to silence. Horwitz et al., (1986) commented: 'any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic'. (p. 128)

In the same vein, when learners' communicative performance is frequently monitored by both the teacher and peers, communication apprehension gets amplified due to the learners' negative self-perceptions caused by their inability to understand others and make themselves understood (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

Many studies attempted to elucidate sources of anxiety in foreign language classes with relation to students' lack of participation. Tsui (1996) found that most teachers attributed students' silence to low English proficiency where students reported their fear of making mistakes and being laughed at by their teacher or classmates. Consequently, the students were reluctant to answer in front of the whole class because of their feelings of anxiety. Also, Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022) reported from their qualitative descriptive study

which aimed to explore learners' perceptions of speaking anxiety in an Algerian EFL setting that both students having a high ability and low ability which was measured through grades might be intimidated by speaking anxiety-provoking situations. Low-ability students explained that their speaking anxiety originated from limited vocabulary mastery, self-criticism, and fear of the teacher while high-ability learners referred to fear of peers' reactions, fear of being misunderstood, and mentioned the classroom atmosphere as a whole can also be intimidating. Feelings of anxiety especially those related to speaking anxiety often lead to withdrawal of classroom oral participation.

Melouah (2013) explained in her paper that some Algerian university teachers perceived students' hesitation to speak and their poor oral performance as an indicator of their anxiety, low proficiency in the language, lack of motivation and interest in both the language and oral classes. She collected the views of 30 first-year LMD students of English through self-report questionnaires. The findings indicated that students who experience anxiety in the classroom anxiety considered the following reasons respectively: fear of interaction, fear of audience, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, low language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation and fear of speaking with natives.

Cubukcu (2007) found that a group of Turkish students consider presenting in front of the class, making mistakes, losing faces, inability to express oneself, fear of failure, fear of not meeting the standards, and teachers are as the primary sources for their anxiety. When students are usually anxious, the quality of their talk can reduce, and sometimes they resort to silence. Lui (2018) concluded in her research that high-anxious students tended to use fewer effective strategies for communication like 'reducing messages and using simple expressions' (p.17) and 'thinking first of what to say in the native language and then constructing the English sentence'

As can be noticed from the results of these studies, FLA hinders interaction and communication. Teachers' intolerance of silence can also create a great deal of anxiety. When teachers for instance repeat the questions to students, students may consider it as a reminder that they are not competent which raise their anxiety. (Tsui, 1996, p.158).

Anxiety can emerge from the fear of negative evaluation. It mainly shows during social evaluative situations like oral presentations, role plays and other activities involving public speaking, hence, students may feel that they are in a position to be criticized by either the teacher or peers.

3.2.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Willingness to communicate has first emerged as a personality trait related to the fact that some L1 users are reluctant to speak and communicate (see McCroskey & Richmond, 1990, 1991). The concept then started being used in L2 learning research. According to MacIntyre et.al, (1998, p.547) WTC is 'a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2'. This definition entails that the opportunity for a student to engage is already there, and it remains to the student to choose whether they want to engage or not.

Zeng (2010) investigated the factors influencing the willingness to talk of Chinese students in university classrooms in Canada. An interview was conducted, and the results showed that students' familiarity with the environment, familiarity with the topic and interlocutor, positive classroom atmosphere, and teacher support were among the factors enhancing students' willingness to communicate. Lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, negative self-image and fear of losing face were among the most inhibiting factors that students considered inhibiting their willingness to communicate in the classroom.

WTC however does not determine whether a student will speak or not. Many students can communicate properly in the foreign language, want to communicate but are unable to do so. Whereas other students with minimal linguistic and communicative competence seem to communicate in the L2 whenever they attain a possibility (MacIntyre et.al., 1998). Consistently, silent students may fall in the above categorisation, and are influenced by similar factors. In this study, I did not aim to measure students' willingness to communicate, but brief references were mentioned whenever decided need in the analysis chapters.

3.2.3. Self-Confidence

Language students' self-confidence is one of the most researched psychological variables in research on second and foreign language learning as it has a direct impact on students' academic performance. (Fook et al.,2011; Aryana, 2010). Djebbari (2014, p. 45) defined self-confidence as 'the amount of reliance one has about himself, i.e., one's knowledge and one's abilities'. Meaning a student trusting their language abilities and their competence to talk if required to. However, this definition can entail that students' lacking self-confidence are students also lacking language abilities. On this regard, a related sub-construct is connected

to this definition which is 'L2 linguistic self-confidence' which refers to 'learners' confidence to communicate in L2' (William, et.al., 2015, p.46).

Foreign language learners cannot speak the language or express themselves freely and fluently without some degree of self-confidence (Brown, 1994), hence, linguistic-self-confidence may be connected to positive attitudes towards the target language and more willingness to communicate. Such positive emotions can lead learners to trust their ability to do a certain task which can be translated into their willingness to perform it, speaking in class can be one of these tasks. In addition, having low self-confidence can be a result of learners' inability to fulfil certain tasks that are required by the teacher and peers. Placing silence in the heart of this discussion, several studies such as (Tsui, 1996; Petress, 2001; Zhouyuan, 2016) concluded that some silent students lack self-confidence in themselves and their language abilities. They experience fear of negative evaluation and fear of embarrassment which lead them to be silent.

3.2.4. Risk-Taking

Risk-taking in language learning can be often associated with highly self-confident learners. Is an individual's tendency to assume risks in using the foreign language in the foreign language class (Ely, 1986). However, Beebe (1983) argued that 'you take a risk every time you open your mouth in a foreign language, or for that matter in any learning situation where you are called on to perform without realizing it, even the most conservative individual takes risks'. (p. 39).

Accordingly, in language learning, where participation and interaction are highly encouraged, risk-taking is not limited to students who are willing to engage in discussions, debates or any other form of oral participation. Students are perceived taking risks by answering questions, sharing their thoughts, as well as commenting on others' ideas which can have an influence on their language development. Kehan (1989) explained that language proficiency is influenced directly by classroom participation which reflects, among other things, the contributing influences of risk-taking.

I mentioned in the previous chapter that silence is considered as a risk-free choice for students to avoid embarrassment and face-lose, therefore, risk-taking may not be an option for students who consider silence as their risk-free strategy. Tatar (2005) investigated a group of Turkish students' participation and silence in a US classroom during one semester period through a qualitative, descriptive, multi-case study approach. She concluded that those students' showed unwillingness to communicate and were silent in classrooms because

of a lack of consideration from their teachers and peers and a lack of acknowledgement to the different opinions and perspective. These negative experiences and feeling insecure restricted their oral participation; and then stopped them from taking risks by sharing their opinions. It is worth noting that those students, however, did not consider their silence as disengagement as they were engaged in non-verbal activities. In this study, it is clear that risk-taking can be possible when the classroom atmosphere and environment of learning is secure.

The concept of risk-taking is challenging in language research. For instance, Brown (2001) thinks that many instructional contexts around the world do not encourage risk-taking, instead, they encourage correctness, right answers, and withhold guesses until one is sure to be correct.

Risk-taking therefore is not encouraged in every learning context. However, learners must endure in their minds that 'interaction requires the risk of failing to produce intended meaning, of failing to interpret intended meaning, of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected. The rewards, of course, are great and worth the risks' (Brown, p. 2001, p.166). Another concept which is closely related to risk-taking is tolerance of ambiguity. Rubin (1975) defines ambiguity tolerance as one of the characteristics of a good learner. Good learner does not feel bad when uncertainty occurs and tries to deal with the ambiguous setting by guessing (p.45). In this vein, tolerance of ambiguity can be demonstrated through risk-taking.

Another study aimed at analysing the current state of Turkish learners' risk-taking ability and its relationship with factors that inhibit them from taking risks. Zarfsas & Takkac (2014) identified six inhibiting factors: teachers' attitude and teaching style, lack of ambiguity tolerance, lack of opportunities due to crowded classrooms, classmates' behaviour, cultural beliefs and lack of prior preparation for class.

Learners' silence and risk-taking have a complex structure due to the interrelationship of all the psychological factors.

3.3. Learning identities and investment in learning

Identity as many other complex concepts has been given different interpretations from various disciplines. Talking about learning identities in this study is important as a learning

identity is a construct influenced by many congruent factors which include events, feelings, experiences and aspirations in the learning context. In this sense identities are considered multiple and in an-ongoing change as long as the learner is engaged in reflection and exhibiting investment in their learning. Giving the dynamic nature of identities, students should not be placed within binary categories such as silent and talkative, motivated and unmotivated. Instead, students should be aware of the interacting factors leading them to adopt, develop or reject certain identities. Lack of awareness of students' identities could compromise a student's investment in the language practices of the classroom (Norton, 2014). In the following I provide a brief review of the construct of identity and relate it to investment in learning.

Norton (2000) work is found in many research studies on learners' identities. Her definition which is influenced by feminist poststructuralist theory (Weedon, 1997), regards identity as:

> How a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future ... understood with reference to larger, and more frequent inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day interactions. (p. 5)

This definition entails understanding oneself and how we connect with others which is similar to Sfard and Prusak (2005) conceptualisation of identity as a narrative and stories about persons. Norton definition also includes the relationship of the individuals with their social context, and how their roles may shift across time, thus shifting their understanding of self and creating new possible identities. This definition is important for this study because the language learner is also a member of a social group where she/he negotiates their roles and positions within a setting and also aspires to reach a designated goal which can entail new roles and new possibilities for becoming. Sfard and Prusak (2005) suggest that identity consist of two subsets: actual and designated, and learning is viewed as the only way for those who wish to bridge between their actual identities and their designated identities. Similarly, Smyth and Fasoli (2007) align student identity with the concept of young people having multiple identities. Succeeding at college may mean having to subdue other identities to act within a narrowly defined and institutionalised view of what it means to be a 'good' student, a process known as 'identity formation'. Therefore, it is important to consider identities as multiple and in a ongoing change and development as some of these identities

will become more stable because of the validations they get from the changes over time and space while others become less prominent.

One of the main figures in the study of social identity is Weedon (1987;1997) who mostly uses the terms 'subjectivity' to refer to identity and she defines it as 'the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relation to the world' (1997, p. 32). Her definition regards the individual or 'subject' and their way of perceiving their relationships with multiple identities in relation to the context that changes in time and space and also it focuses on the contradictory nature of identity as being multiple, where a person may have an inner struggle in thinking and feeling either consciously or unconsciously. Similarly, Norton (2013) regards learner identity as 'multiple…site of struggle… and changing across time and space' (p. 45).

The perspective on identity as multiple has been established in applied linguistics community in the last three decades. Many studies on language learners' identities are found to tackle the identity of the language learner as a speaker of a foreign/second language versus his/her national identity which includes their national culture and language for instance (see Byung-Jin, 2003; Chen and Li, 2009; Kramsch, 2009; Zacharias, 2012; Park & Lo, 2012). However, many other studies covered students' learning identities within the classroom in relation to their roles and positions. For instance, Ziad (2021) conclude in his study that a group of Algerian students displayed a wide array of learning identities including: language related identities (Arabic, Tamazight, English and French) and other identities which are (geek identity, video gamer identity and memer identity) and he suggests that 'self-assessment has to be constructed as an identity rather than merely a tool or a skill' (p.144). He explains that a self-assessor identity helps the learner to set sustainable goals, and through reflection they push their goals further and achieve new imagined identities. He also recommends that language learners should understand their desires through reflection and investing in the construction of new identities because the key for constructing new identities is desire and joy.

Similarly, Zekri (2020) conclude that a group of Algerian female students studying English in an Algerian university have a 'developmental learning identity' through students' narratives, she could illustrate the role of 'mentors' and 'marks' in past learning experiences impact on shaping students' learning identities and students' agency in the present. A remarkable metaphor which she wrote to describe this process is 'developing a learning identity

is what the learner in the present takes up from the past, to modify the future'. (ibid, p.188). Also, Berzeski (2017) argues that 'there are specific literacy practices associated with specific identities, and that aspects of these are utilised, and engaged with by students in the college classroom to support their learning'. (p. 404)

Based on the previous definitions, it is possible to argue that the roles that students associate with in their engagement in the classroom are constructed by the relationships and experiences they have, and these roles are continuously changing through time and space. Norton (2013) suggests the construct of 'investment' which is similar to that of motivation. However, she believes that motivation deals with the psychology of the language learner as of what is happening inside the learner whereas investment is about what is happening outside the language learner: their social, historical and cultural backgrounds. Investment and multiple identities are important for this study because it exceeds the naïve binaries of categorising students as motivated and unmotivated, confident or shy, introverts or extroverts. Investment looks at the extent to which a language learner is invested in time, efforts and capitals to learn a target language (Bass, 2012).

Additionally, learners' investments can be selective, students can choose the skills which they want to develop, as skills have different values in relation to the multiple identities they desire to affiliate with (Norton, 2014). Students' selective investment in learning is not only shaped by the existing communities such as schools or current classrooms, but also their imagined community, that is 'communities include future relationships that exist only in the learner's imagination' (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 242). Hence, students adopting a certain affiliation, role, or identity, can have imagined affiliations and roles which can affect their choices of investment in learning desired skills.

To my knowledge, research has not yet identified a silent learner identity and how this identity is constructed and influenced by the different historical and contextual factors surrounding the language learner and how students invest in their learning and select their desired investment to achieve desired learning goals or skills.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to cover some of the widely discussed factors involved in the understanding of classroom silence. The contextual factors and internal factors all seemed

varied, but it is almost impossible to claim whether silence has been caused by one separately. All of these factors seem to add to one another and feeds into classroom silence leading to argue that silence is multifaceted, complex and cannot be explained by a cause-effect dichotomy. I also referred to an important aspect related to the language learners which is learner multiple identities. I believe that understanding the way students learn, adapt to their environment, and invest to reach to their learning goals necessitates an understanding of the different interacting identities that these learners have and the way some of these identities are becoming prominent or less prominent. Such an understanding can also help in the understanding of the different aspects related to classroom silence, why some students invest in oral skills where others invest in other language skills, why some students consider themselves members of learning groups and others do not and finally how can students be silent and invested in developing their designated learning identity.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Rationale, Data collection and research procedures

4. Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological choices used during this study. Section 4.1. I provide the foundations for the research design of this study by locating my research in the interpretive qualitative paradigm and provides the rationale for choosing an ethnographic stance. Section 4.2. provides description of the setting and discusses the rationale for the sampling used in this research. In section 4.3. I describe and justify the different data collection methods employed. After that, in section 4.4. I present the rationale for choosing reflexive thematic analysis as a suitable analytical method. Section 4.5. discusses my reflexivity and positionality. Finally, I comment on the ethical implications of this study and briefly summarise some of the challenges I encountered while conducting this research and a summary conclusion of the chapter.

4.1. Philosophical Assumptions

In qualitative research, researchers are expected to choose a paradigm that reflects their assumptions and the nature of the knowledge they are presenting to the world. Waring (2017) defines a paradigm as 'a person's conception of the world, its nature, and their position in it' (p. 17) and Holliday (2016) believes that 'there does need to be an "umbrella" strategy of investigation or methodology within any research project that drives whatever methods of data collection and analysis are used whether they are quantitative or qualitative' (p. 20). These philosophical assumptions are often discussed epistemologically, which concerns how reality is known or what should be acceptable knowledge in a discipline, ontologically, which refers to how we define reality, and methodologically, which concerns the research process.

According to Clark et al. (2021), whether social research should be studied using the principles and procedures of natural sciences is frequently debated. Doing so reflects the two epistemological positions of positivism and interpretivism. This research is taking an interpretivist stance and interpretivism assumes that researchers in social sciences are required to understand the subjective experiences of social actions, their interpretations and how they are understood by others (ibid).

Ontology, for interpretivist researchers, regards the nature of social entities as a social construction that continues to develop and grow from people's perceptions and actions: constructionism or constructivism (Clark et al, 2021). Adhering to interpretivists' view, I understand that individuals' classroom experiences, their perception of the world around them and their practices and interpretations of events are subjective; individuals construct meaning in their lives from their experiences and interactions with people around them, which they use as a lens to interpret reality.

Next, I delve into the influence of interpretivism on this study.

4.1.1. Choosing Interpretivism

The interpretivist paradigm considers reality a social construct coloured by people's subjective experiences and interpretations. In this study, I sought to understand participants' subjective experiences of classroom silence. The interpretive paradigm offered a holistic view of how reality is altered by human experiences in social contexts. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 19) state 'the centre endeavour of the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience'.

I selected an interpretive position for three reasons. First, the interpretive approach aligns with the major aim of the research, which is exploring how students and teachers interpret silence in the classroom and their subjective teaching and learning experiences in such learning environments. The interpretive approach allows a researcher to explore participants' insights and knowledge of their experiences and individualistic perceptions of reality. Second, I believe that knowledge collected from classroom research is best understood from learners' and teachers' experiences and their self-interpretations of events. EFL learners and teachers in the context of this study provided in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon of silence in the EFL classes where their voices were both heard and researched. Third, the

interpretive approach enables me to analyse participants' perspectives and place them within a scientific research frame. As Clark et al. (2021, p. 26-27) state:

> The researcher provides an interpretation of others' interpretations …and there is a third level interpretation occurring, because the researcher's interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories and literature of a discipline.

This is relevant to my research purposes because participants provided subjective knowledge that was drawn from their experiences, so multi-level analysis and interpretation enabled me to understand these subjective experiences and position them within specific contextual events, periods and environments.

Further, this process requires the researcher to be aware of their subjective beliefs and how they perceive and interpret participants' actions and the events during which their actions occur. The researcher is an instrument in qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2012), which means, in addition to collecting data, I engaged with participants and affirmed respondents' validity to ethically engage with their claims. This is discussed further in my discussion of reflexivity and trustworthiness. See sections

4.1.2. Opting for a Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research aims to provide knowledge about a particular topic or phenomenon through the researcher's engagement with individuals and places. It broadly takes an inductive approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Clark et al., 2021), an interpretivist nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Clark et., 2021) and a constructionist ontological position (Clark et al., 2021).

Following the qualitative research design, the researcher aims to gain insights about the studied individuals and explains the nature of events and their impact on participants' views, how they present their beliefs and the process of altering beliefs that is known as the 'process of change' (Bryman, 2015). The rapport between the participants and the researcher allows data to expand into detailed subjective descriptions of individual experiences. These details also allow the researcher to generate thick descriptions (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Bryman, 2015).

The qualitative approach allowed me to explore the complex nature of the EFL classroom, understand my participants' subjective experiences and remain flexible and reflexive when handling different types of data. Also, this flexibility allowed for this study to be data-driven

and inductive and allowed me to develop the research questions continuously throughout the study. The structure of the qualitative approach to data collection allowed me to immerse myself in the setting with participants and gradually modify the study focus. Reeves et al. (2013) explain, 'questions are therefore not necessarily specified at the beginning of this endeavour, instead this approach facilitates an inductive and iterative approach whereby thick description leads to the development of research questions as the social phenomenon is being studied.' (p. 1367).

Qualitative research is often based on in-depth data collected from a small sample of participants. The rationale for sampling is discussed in Section 4.2. I selected a set of qualitative research instruments intended to explore the dynamics of EFL classrooms in terms of participation, engagement, and preferences regarding appropriate forms of teaching and learning. Each research method I have chosen is further discussed in this thesis (Section 4.3). For this study, the reflexive approach to thematic analysis (TA) or reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019), which reflects the values of a qualitative paradigm, is employed to analyse data (Section 4.4). This allowed me to reveal the nature of different learning environments, participants' perceptions of their classroom participation, the rationale for some of the teaching and learning practices found in the setting and include my interpretive voice in data analysis.

4.1.3. Taking an Ethnographic Stance

In referring to the role of ethnography in classroom research, Van Lier (1988) noted that research within a classroom should look at 'why things in classrooms happen, the way they do, and in this way expose complex relationships between individual participants in the classroom and the social forces that influence it.' (p. 82). Exploring such complex relationships and interpreting the observed events and incidents depended entirely on whether silent students would agree to participate in this study. I believed that understanding their perceptions and giving insight into the phenomenon of silence in the language classroom would be impossible without engaging students. The ethnographic nature of the study was, thus, clear from the beginning but a suitable approach only became clear once I was in the field.

At the beginning of the study, I was concerned about how to engage silent students in a study that aimed to research their silence. This concern was somewhat legitimate due to the complexnarratives about silent students. Before going to the field, I planned to address this concern by researching the existing teaching and learning cultures and how silence was used

by students and teachers in the research setting. My primary sources for data collection were observation, ethnographic chats and field notes.

However, being in the field eliminated those concerns; I engaged with many participants and used an assortment of research methods, many of which were developed in the field. My approach was completely flexible and aligned with Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007, p. 3) description of ethnographic work: studying people's actions in an everyday context, using an assortment of data sources with an emphasis on observation and informal conversations that focus in-depth on a small number of cases or a group and analysing data via verbal descriptions, explanations and interpretations of meaning.

As this was a classroom research study, the above features are reflected in the limited number of participants, specific research setting, flexibility in using the research instruments and reliance on classroom observation, field notes, interviews and students' diaries.

Some researchers consider ethnography a prolonged investigation in which the researcher is immersed in a group or a culture and adopts an insider position; they learn to speak the language, wear the clothes and eat the food of the researched culture. Some have called it 'going native' and as O'Reilly (2009, p. 6) suggested, 'persuading people to accept a researcher into their daily lives, to live amongst them, to spend time watching, listening, and asking questions can be daunting'. Although this conventional view is no longer required for an ethnographic work, I was aware of the issue of prolonged engagement in the field with participants. Some scholars proposed focused ethnography, in the sense that an ethnographic researcher could investigate a particular issue that is predetermined with a research question or questions before starting field visits over a short period. I selected a focused ethnography research methodology.

4.1.3.1. Focused Ethnography

A focused ethnography investigates certain elements of the culture to which the researcher belongs (Knoblauch, 2005) and the cultures and sub-cultures within a certain community or phenomenon and context in which participants have specific knowledge about an identified problem (Higginbottom, Pillay & Boadu, 2013; Stahlke-Wall, 2015).

Focused ethnographies have mainly been used in healthcare and medical education research, mostly in nursing, where the studies are problem-oriented and context-specific and the researcher has prior knowledge about the field (Wall, 2015). Many of these studies use

focused ethnography as an adapted ethnographic approach to meet certain requirements and avoid the limitations of conventional ethnographies. Muecke (1994, p. 199) defines the features of focused ethnographic studies as:

- Time-limited exploratory studies
- Focus on discrete community, organization or social phenomena
- Episodic participant observation
- The use of both unstructured and partially structured interviews
- Limited number of participants
- Participants hold specific knowledge about the research phenomenon

After reflecting on these features, I began with specific research questions about classroom silence, forms of participation in the language classroom and other teaching and learning practices rather than an open-ended intent to discover a new culture. Specifically, I wanted to understand the motives and reasons behind students' being silent or choosing to be silent, teachers' different perceptions and practices regarding silence and silent students and the characteristics of learning environments and the different classroom dynamics that may affect the students' participation and skills, and I also wanted to gain in-depth knowledge of the different experiences and trajectories these participants had, how they were viewed by their teachers and peers and, most importantly, how silence affected students' learning and the general classroom dynamics. Knowing these questions and the research focus before entering the field did not restrict my focus or limit my discoveries. I was still flexible and discussed anything that seemed relevant to participants and the study, and this brought up many related topics that I was not aware of before starting my field visits. However, given the limited time I had in the field, I needed to start with a focused topic and remain flexible to learn about other matters that observation revealed or participants brought to my attention.

More than that, in conventional ethnographies, many scholars argue that a researcher must be alien to a culture to discover the unexpected through their unfamiliarity with the culture being researched. Although this notion is not much of an issue for recent approaches to ethnography, Knoblauch (2005) mentions that a focused ethnography researcher can belong to the culture they are researching. I followed this premise; I had already been a student at the selected university, I had background knowledge and previous experience with the field of study and some of the participants happened to be my former teachers. My familiarity

with the setting and its culture was a major concern at the beginning as I wished to avoid personal bias.

Therefore, writing about my subjectivity and the personal baggage I could have brought to this study was important and is discussed in section 4.5. on reflexivity. Although many of the incidents I encountered during data collection seemed familiar and I could relate to many of them, I considered this a gain, given the interpretive nature of the study, as it allowed me to negotiate many incidents, beliefs and experiences with participants who expressed different stances and opinions in different situations. Whether conscious or not, those representations of reality depended on how the participants made sense of them. This aligns with Knoblauch (2005, p. 6-8), who believes that it is possible for a focused ethnography researcher to research 'a backdrop of common, shared knowledge' with participants and still to discover 'alterity'.

Therefore, it is fair to say that I filled both insider and outsider roles and found myself at different points along the continuum at different times, depending on the situation, the participants I was dealing with and the process of reflexivity.

I mentioned before that I used several research instruments, including classroom observation, which was intermittent due to the limited number of teachers I engaged with during data collection and other factors such as holidays, seminars, national events and exams. Although the period during which I conducted classroom observation was limited to two and a half months, the data were rich and resulted in many unexpected findings.

I also used semi-structured interviews and informal ethnographic chats (included as field notes) with participants, engaging in dialogic interactions that I believe facilitated their critical reflection on incidents and negotiation of positions. This allowed me to gain in-depth interpretations and thoughts from my participants and to see the different perspectives and contradictions in how an event was interpreted by the same participant on different occasions.

The particular setting I chose for this research, the selection of participants who were silent in the classroom and my pre-selection of the research topic or phenomenon led me to consider that this study would be best described as a focused ethnography.

4.2. Defining Participants and the Research Setting

This section describes the research setting and participants involved in this study.

4.2.1. Research Setting

In choosing the setting, I came across Holliday's (2016) notion of selecting research setting with clear boundaries:

> Definable setting in which phenomena can be placed meaningfully within a specific social environment. Such an environment can be groups of people, institutions, cases, geographical areas, communities, texts, and so on … it is important that the scenario has clear boundaries (p. 34).

Hence, the setting where this research took place comprises the physical environment of the department of English at a university in the west of Algeria, and the group of people engaged in this research are my participants. These boundaries could be altered because some participants were more engaged than others and I observed certain modules more than other modules. This reflects Hammersley & Atkinson's (2007, p.32) notion that 'boundaries are not fixed but shift across occasions'.

Along the same lines, identifying an ideal site that allowed the researcher to enter and offered a high probability of rich structures of interest, the ability to build rapport with participants and assured the quality and credibility of data was important (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

I chose this university because access was guaranteed as I had been a student there for five years. I had connections with people in the administration and some teachers, who allowed me to attend their classes. In addition, my understanding and pre-knowledge of the site suited my methodological choices, as explained in Section 4.1.3.1. Fieldwork involved the department of English as a whole with a special focus on the classrooms where I wrote most of my observation notes. This is justified by the nature of my research, which is classroom focused.

The department of English is one of the busiest departments in the university. It is comprised of normal classrooms with tables, chairs, and a teachers' desk. Most of these classrooms have a blackboard. When teachers require the use of PowerPoint, they ask for projectors, which are provided by the administration beforehand according to a first-come, first-served policy. Lessons presented with and without projectors seemed to vary from one teacher to another and from one module to another. I conducted most of the classroom observations in these classrooms and planned the teachers' interviews there as well, except for Rosa (a participant), who requested that I interview her in the teachers' room.

There are also language laboratories, which have computers, whiteboards, and a projector. They are mostly used for oral production sessions, in which students can practice their speaking and listening skills. Most language laboratories are designed in a 'U' shape, and I conducted some classroom observation sessions in these language laboratories in addition to brief, occasional chats with some teachers.

The department has a room for internet facilities that is shared with the departments of French, Spanish and translation studies. There is also a study space with tables and chairs where I held occasional chats and formal interviews with students. There is a library facility with a list of books that students can select and ask the librarian for, as well as a shared reading space for students.

The boundaries of the research setting, therefore, were mostly within the department of English.

4.2.2. Participants

This research study involved thirteen main EFL university student and teacher participants, sixteen peripheral ones, and six whose names were codified. The main student participants, with whom I had formal and informal interviews and who were given pseudonyms, were eight women: Sanaa, Wissam, Linda, Nour, Zeyneb, Anne, Lina and Rima. The main teacher participants were Rosa, Israa, Yahya, Amel, and Wissal. The peripheral participants' engagement in the study was limited to occasional chats and diaries. My peripheral participants were 13 students, three were given names: Salma, Ikram and Ihab and those who wrote diaries were codified by numbers. The peripheral teachers were Zina, Noura and Leon.

In the early stages of data collection, my selection of participants was mainly based on my observations, following Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007, p. 107) statement:

> Who is interviewed, when and how, will usually be decided as the research progresses, according to the ethnographer's assessment of the current state of his or her knowledge, and according to judgements about how it might be best developed further.

As part of my target population was students who tend to be silent, the selection of students was challenging in the field. Moreover, many students, mainly males, claimed that they worked or were engaged in other tasks after studying. This led me to choose female students, who seemed more willing to engage outside of study hours.

Also, some of the teachers who seemed interesting because of how they taught and engaged their students were the busiest. They were involved in administration work, which made interviewing them almost impossible as meetings were cancelled at short notice and they would sometimes prioritise other duties while present at the university.

Therefore, I selected non-probability sampling as the most convenient for this study because it permits the researcher to choose participants based on specific expertise or experience (Denscombe, 2017, p. 34). I also used different types of non-probability sampling at different stages to meet the needs of the research, as will be explained in subsequent subsections. According to Cohen et al. (2018, p. 265), this is called 'sampling triangulation', which is the use of different samples and subsamples in one research work. The use of these different samples in my study depended on the field circumstances and did not occur for the sake of triangulation.

Non-probability sampling does not aim for generalizability and statistical representativeness, it only represents itself, as action research, case studies and ethnographic studies generally do (Cohen et al., 2018; Aurini, Heath & Howells, 2016, Denscombe, 2017).

Next, I explain in more detail the selection of students and teachers for this study.

4.2.2.1. Student Participants

The student participants were second-year students undertaking their Licence degree in the 2019–2020 academic year. I chose this level primarily because the curriculum of second-year LMD students is a follow-up to the first year; assuming that students have adjusted to the university regime, they are familiar with how participation and in-classroom engagement are practised, assessed and monitored. Additionally, the modules cover general areas such as linguistics, phonetics, literature, civilisation and the four language skills.

To select students, I used two different methods; purposive sampling with students who volunteered for this research and snowball sampling, in which my participants referred me to other members of their groups or friends who also belonged to my target population, i.e., silent students.

Purposive sampling is regarded as one of the features of qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2018; Aurini, Heath & Howells, 2016). Cohen et al. (2018, p. 218) explain that, in purposive sampling, 'researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristic(s) being sought. They

assemble the sample to meet their specific needs'. To use this sampling method, I approached students whom I observed engaged in tasks that did not require oral participation, and minimally engaged or silent during required oral interactions in the classroom.

Snowball sampling was not planned at the beginning of this study. It emerged when student participants offered to invite peers from the same groups that I had observed. Also, as is explained in Section 4.3.4. a teacher helped by distributing the diary to her students. Therefore, I adopted snowball sampling because it 'uses participants' social networks and personal contacts for gaining access to people' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 221). An example of this selection is when Nour introduced me to Rima.

Ultimately, I had eight female students who consented to formal interviews, and 13 male and female students who kept diaries and students for the informal chats whose data are included as field notes. I selected solely female students for the formal interviews because of the proportion of female students who attended these courses compared to male students. In addition, male students were reluctant to meet for formal interviews due to job commitments, as mentioned above.

Using both purposive and snowball sampling allowed me to interact with students who could provide more insight for this study. I was able to capture incongruent perceptions, perspectives and interpretations of classroom silence, interaction, rapport and other themes.

It is important to note that referring to this research sample as Algerian EFL students by no means represents Algerian students studying English in Algeria or the selected university, and I am not using the term 'silent students' to categorise students or claim that the findings typify students who are silent in the classroom. Holliday (2016, p. 93) states:

> A very small qualitative study can be just one piece of a very large jigsaw puzzle, illuminating one instance of social behaviour, which when put alongside other instances from other studies, begin to build the larger picture.

This instance of social behaviour shows that participants' experiences and interpretations of incidents were diverse, and sometimes participants altered their initial understandings when variables changed or through negotiating meanings and sense-making processes. Through this, I became aware that providing ethnographic information about this group of participants serves as one piece of the broader context of classroom research and classroom silence.

In the next section, I explain the rationale for selecting teachers for this study.

4.2.2.2.   Teacher Participants

I used convenience and purposive sampling to select teachers for this study. As previously mentioned, I first approached teachers who allowed me to observe their classes. All of these teachers participated in informal interviews and occasional chats about classroom activities. However, I opted for convenience sampling due to teachers' availability in the setting. Aurini, Heath and Howells (2016, p. 55) explain that 'a convenience sample selects participants based on their ease of availability and lacks any clear sampling strategy. The selection process relies on including those who are the most eager and able to participate in the study'. Despite lacking a clear sampling strategy, the teachers selected included both men and women with different degrees of teaching experience who taught different ranges of modules and were teaching second-year Bachelor degree students.

The EFL teachers who were included in this research ranged from experienced teachers with twelve years of teaching to novice teachers with three years' experience, from different specialities of English language teaching. Four main female teachers and one male teacher were selected and three participated as peripheral.

I presented myself in the field like a student . Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 66) mention that 'the researcher's appearance can be an important factor in shaping relationships with people in the field'. I purposely avoided formal clothing to appear approachable to students. This might have affected my rapport with teachers in the field. I believe many teachers considered me a student or a former student. Some teachers would refer to my background as a student or my lack of a practical experience in language teaching and classroom management whenever a question or a request for clarification seemed interrogative in nature. Therefore, I mainly chose teachers close in age to me and those with friendly reputations. Despite this, I only acquired five teachers for formal interviews and seven for classroom observations.

4.3. Data Collection

This section discusses my choices of research instruments during data collection, namely: classroom observation, interviews, field notes and students' diaries.

Data were collected over two months, starting in early November 2019 to the third week of January 2020, with a break between 10 December 2019 and 5 January 2020 due to

presidential elections and winter holidays. I defined the data collection process after initial interactions in the field and meeting with possible participants.

The classroom observation was performed throughout nearly the entire period of my presence in Algeria. I conducted 13 formal interviews, eight of which were formal semi-structured interviews with students and five with teachers. I explain my selection of participants in the previous section. In this section, I seek to describe as exactly as possible how data collection was conducted to explicate participants' views and classroom behaviours.

Although classroom observation and students' diaries were the main instruments at the start of the study, interviews and field notes became relevant as the study progressed. This reflects Dornyei's statement that 'the design of most qualitative data collection is fluid and open-ended, and researchers are not required to plan all elements of the project at the outset' (Dornyei, 2007, p. 15). Therefore, decisions about the process of using the research instruments were not systematic but rather an imprecise process that reflected 'the complex real-life situations that the data concerns' (ibid).

Similarly, data analysis did not happen separately after data collection but was rather a 'cyclical process of going back and forth between data analysis and data collection' (Dornyei, 2007, p. 126).

This section presents how the classroom observations, interviews, field notes and students' diaries were conducted in this study. I start with classroom observation (Section 4.3.1) as it is the method I used most extensively. Then, I describe how interviews were conducted in Section 4.3.2, which comprises student and teacher interviews, as well as other types of interviews that I attempted to use to collect data. The third subsection shows my use of field notes in this study, describing the field and the different types of data that were included via this method. The final subsection describes the process of collecting students' diaries.

4.3.1. Classroom Observation

In this subsection, I describe how observations were conducted in this study. These occurred throughout my fieldwork. I initially planned to conduct non-structured classroom observation to obtain real-life data about students' silence during classroom oral interactions. Eventually, my observation notes included a variety of students and teachers' behaviours, feedback, and data about interaction patterns in the classroom.

Cohen et al. (2018, p. 543-544) state that 'semi-structured and unstructured observations will review observational data before suggesting an explanation for the phenomenon being studied… and it is responsive to what it finds and therefore, by definition, is faithful to the situation as it unfolds'. In other words, observation describes events as they appear without pre-judgement and then the researcher infers interpretations of the observed situations.

Therefore, I recorded situations and incidents related to silent students as they occurred naturally. In the first few sessions of classroom observation, I feared missing some occurrences or being unable to fully concentrate on events. I also feared including my opinions and tried to minimally include my thoughts on the events observed. However, on my second day, I noticed that writing the notes and including my thoughts on the side of the paper was less taxing. This led me to include data related to all aspects of teaching and learning, including, for instance, feedback, teachers' language within the classroom, participation and interaction patterns, group and pair-work activities, turn-taking and many other aspects related to classroom interaction and dynamics.

Five modules were observed during data collection: grammar, linguistics, literary texts (literature), comprehensive writing expression (CWE), and oral production. The number of observations for each module are given in Table 4.1, below.

Modules	Number of observations
Grammar	3
Linguistics	3
Literature	4
CWE	4
Oral Production	7

Table 4.1- Number of classroom observations for each of the modules.

All 21 observation sessions occurred in the department of English, as discussed in Section 4.2.1, with second-year students undertaking bachelor's degree and typically aged 18–25 years old. I initially selected teachers who were convenient, as discussed in Section 4.2.2.2,

and allowed me to observe their sessions. Therefore, I would describe the selection of these modules for observation as opportunistic based on teachers' availability and connections. A total of four groups were observed. Each of the groups included 30 to 40 in-person students.

My role during observation was an observer-as-participant (Cohen et al., 2018, p.543). It is characterized by the researcher's lack of or minimal involvement. I was minimally engaged in the sessions I observed; sometimes teachers would ask me for an opinion or to explain some aspect of my experience abroad. As explained earlier, I was afraid to let my preconstructed knowledge of the classroom experience, based on my own experience as a former student in the same university, colour my observation. Therefore, I was careful to interfere minimally.

In classrooms with rows, I would try to arrive before the teacher and sit in the back corner of the room. In other classes with a 'U' shape, mainly the language laboratory, teachers offered to share their desk at the front of the classroom.

There are major risks frequently associated with observation, as Cohen et al. (2018, p. 560) mention. I explain how I approached each of these issues during data collection below:

- *Selective attention of the observer:* The observer's interests and experiences can sometimes interfere with where to look and what to look at.

Most of the classrooms that I observed were overcrowded. The sitting arrangements were long rows or, in the laboratory, a 'U' shape. In the latter, students brought tables from outside to accommodate the lack of seats. I typically chose to sit in a back corner, where I could not always see some individuals.

However, I tried to be attentive to which students talked or did not, teachers' circulation in the classroom, students' desk interactions and all other types of interactions. Attending several sessions with the same groups helped me to reach more students and take account of the whole learning environment.

- *Reactivity:* Participants may change their behaviour because of the observer's presence.

I started data collection by the start of the first semester. At that time, many students only attended sessions a few times, if they were not entirely absent. My appearance as a student helped me integrate easily into groups, and many participants continued in their daily routines without paying much attention to my presence. Additionally, my presence did not

seem to affect the way they participated, talked, shared their opinions or were silent. However, after talking to students in stimulated recall interviews that occurred after observation sessions, I noticed that a particular male student was overtly participating in the following session. His behaviour was altered after a small conversation about his silence in the classroom.

Teachers did not seem to be affected by my presence in their sessions. In one session, a teacher asked me to take over for another teacher who was in a short meeting with the administration. My position shifted from student researcher to teacher. Students' reactivity in this situation yielded rich data, as the students' behaviour was completely different from what I observed with their teachers.

- *Selective data entry:* Observers may record their interpretations rather than the phenomenon itself.

I amended this issue by including notes on my diary and the side notes. I wrote descriptive observation notes and included my interpretations of incidents separately.

- *Selective memory:* When notes are written after the event, the researcher can unintentionally neglect and select memories.

Descriptive notes were written during the observation sessions. I also kept a diary for personal reflections on the events. Generally, when I shared a desk with teachers, I wrote notes immediately after the observation sessions to reduce the teachers' reactivity. Additionally, whenever I was close to students, I avoided handwriting in front of them, instead using my smartphone, which gave the impression that I was simply using my phone and not writing about their behaviour.

Alongside observations, interviews clarified and sometimes contradicted the classroom observation data, which reveals individuals' multiple realities, multiple learning identities and other social factors such as power relations and peer dynamics. In the following section, I detail the interview process in this study.

4.3.2. Interviews

In this subsection, I give the rationales for my use of interviews, the interview process, student interviews, teacher interviews and stimulated recall interviews.

Interviews were very helpful for gathering in-depth data on participants. Interviewing is regarded as 'an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce

knowledge' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 17-18). I sought to collect ethnographic information and interpretations of practices related broadly to English language teaching and learning and specifically to students' silence through interviews.

Interviews were used simultaneously with classroom observations and field notes. They enabled me to obtain detailed data as the flow and relevance of topics varied with participants' experiences.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with five teachers and eight students. The semi-structured interviews are 'purposeful interactions in which an investigator attempts to learn what another person knows about a topic, to discover and record what that person has experienced, what he or she thinks and feels about it, and what significance or meaning it might have' (Mears, 2017, p. 183). I opted for semi-structured interviews to gain access to participants' beliefs regarding classroom silence and related topics.

The semi-structured life-world interview, as described by Kvale and Brinkmann, is 'a planned and flexible interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (2009, p. 327). These interviews are similar to informal conversations or 'a conversation with a purpose' (Richards, 2009, p. 186). They run smoothly and naturally without attaching formality to the situation.

I specify that some interviews are called 'formal' within this study. The main distinction I make between formal interviews and the informal interviews or conversations which are discussed in the field note section is that formal interviews were planned, had a specific setting and required participants' consent on-site for the data gathered.

The informal conversations or interviews happened spontaneously; they were opportunistic incidents that facilitated participants' recruitment for formal interviews and are included as field notes.

I encouraged participants to narrate experiences instead of providing short answers to questions. These narrations helped to co-construct knowledge and gain detailed stories from participants that occasionally included biographical information and ethnographic stories.

Ethical procedures were respected: I explained the purpose of the study, collected informed consent and ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of my participants. I explain these procedures in detail in Section 4.6.

In the following section, I explain the interview process for student interviews, teacher interviews and stimulated recall interviews.

4.3.2.1. Interview Process

I followed Richards' four steps of collecting data via interviews, 'preparing for an interview, setting it up, getting the interaction right during the interview itself and the final organisation of your data after the interview is finished' (2009, p. 187).

After this process, I took themes and topics that suggested themselves from observation notes and informal chats for the formal interviews. Students became acquainted with the concepts used in the study and this helped them think retrospectively about their experiences as silent students and introspectively about their current self-perceptions regarding participation, silence and related topics. The interview questions focused on students' experiences and interpretations of their silence and lack of oral engagement in the classroom. I started with general and cultural views on silence and then moved on to specific classroom and related settings. The set of topics that I prepared in advance was flexible and allowed students to integrate other topics into the interviews.

I asked one question at a time and allowed participants to elaborate.

After I received informed consent, I proceeded with the formal interviews. I set up the interviews via physical meetings, Facebook Messenger and telephone calls. Most of the interviews were conducted individually in the study space of the library at the department of English and all were audio-recorded.

As mentioned previously, I opted to co-construct knowledge with participants; therefore, the topics were participant-driven. Nonetheless, I asked some questions more than once to clarify the intended meanings, and I asked for personal experiences whenever I felt that the participant could provide one. This is an example of the use of probes following Flick's (2014, p. 208) statement 'probing can consist of spontaneous interventions by the interviewer (e.g., "Could you please tell me more about what you just mentioned?".

The interview questions changed from one participant to another, due to the nature of their different experiences. I also asked follow-up questions during the interviews whenever I perceived that a topic or an idea needed further explanation. I also conducted one follow-up interview nine months after data collection.

During the formal interviews, I noticed reactivity from two students (Sanaa and Linda) and one teacher (Israa). Their answers to the interview questions were short and they avoided personal narratives, unlike in the informal conversations and casual chats we had had previously.

4.3.2.2.   Student Interviews

As discussed in Section 4.2.2.1, the students I interviewed were members of the groups that I observed in the classroom. Most interviews were set up during the data collection period and a few during data analysis.

I had eight total interviews with students; I selected six from my observation and two students were introduced by their friends. The interviews varied in length, with an average duration of 35 minutes. In addition, I had numerous informal interviews with other students, which I included as field notes (Section 4.3.3). However, for the sake of clarity, I mention the number of interviews I had with each student, including informal ones.

A summary of the participants and interviews is provided in the following table:

Participants	Number of Interviews	Interview type
Nour	2	Informal Interview: Not recorded Formal Interview: Recorded
Linda	2	Informal Interview: Not recorded Formal Interview: Recorded
Anne	2	Informal Interview: Not recorded Formal Interview: Recorded
Lina	3	Informal Interview: Not recorded Formal Interview: Recorded Follow-up Interview (Formal): Facebook (video call)
Ryma	1	Formal Interview: Recorded
Sanaa	2	Informal Interview: Recorded Formal Interview: Recorded
Wissam	2	Informal Interview: Recorded Formal Interview: Recorded
Zeyneb	1	Formal Interview: Recorded

Table 4.2. Details of Students' Interviews

In formal interviews, I interviewed each student individually in the language they chose. Four students (Anne, Lina, Sanaa and Wissam) preferred to use English. The other four students switched between the Algerian dialect and English. I initiated all discussions with potential participants in the Algerian dialect, following Marschan-Piekkari and Reis's (2004, p. 225) suggestion that 'access to potential informants and the nature of the relationship between them are very much influenced by the shared language between the researcher and interviewee'.

I considered the Algerian dialect our shared language because I had minimal knowledge of participants' English language skills as they were silent in the classrooms that I observed. I also aimed to establish a trusting rapport and reduce the power imbalance, especially as my status as a PhD student researcher from a UK university made many students think that I used English like a native speaker and some asked me to show them different accents that I know. Reflecting on that situation led me to start any conversation in Arabic as not all students would be comfortable answering in English. I then allowed the participants to lead with the language they selected during the conversations.

4.3.2.3.   Teacher Interviews

As in students' interviews, I conducted five semi-structured formal interviews with teachers of English in the studied department. I also had informal discussions with teachers, which are included in the field notes section 4.3.3. Table 4.3 includes details about teachers who participated in the formal interviews and their years of experience. I did not include the informal discussions in this table because they occurred more often than those with students but were very brief and so could not all be counted as informal interviews.

Participants	Current teaching role
Wissal	Literature
Amel	CWE (Writing)
Israa	Oral Production Study Skills
Rosa	Study Skills
Yahya	Linguistics

Table 4.3. Details of Teachers' Formal Interviews

I interviewed each of the teachers individually. We typically chose the teachers' common room as an initial venue for meetings but quickly moved to an empty classroom because of the noise. Teachers discussed their methodology and understanding of the process of

language learning. They explained their understanding and shared their beliefs about students' silence and silent students. In addition, the interviews covered teachers' preferred modes of participation, how they assess classroom interactions and how they involve quiet students.

Although the casual chats we had while walking to a classroom and informal interviews in which we discussed particular ideas were in the Algerian dialect and French, all of the female interviewees spoke in English during the formal interview, and Yahya used the Algerian dialect, French and English.

Unlike in student interviews, I did not ask teachers for personal experiences. I focused on their professional beliefs regarding their teaching practices. However, some teachers supported their answers and explained their practices by narrating personal experiences.

In addition to the aforementioned set of interviews, I planned to conduct stimulated recall interviews with students. I explain that process and the obstacles I encountered with this type of interview next.

4.3.2.4.   Stimulated Recall Interviews

Mackey and Gass (2005) define stimulated recalls (StRs) as 'an introspective technique for gathering data that can yield insights into a learner's thought processes during language learning [or using] experiences' (p. 366). I attempted to use stimulated recall interviews to gain in-depth knowledge from students on the classroom events that they experienced while I was observing.

I attempted to set at least one stimulated recall interview after each observation session; however, I found it difficult to involve students in this type of interview and most students refused to provide details or explanations as I requested. I could not use a camera to record the classroom interactions. The head of the school considered taking videos intrusive to individuals' privacy and against the staff and students' comfort.

Additionally, I noted that some of the students whom I approached for the stimulated recall interviews showed reactivity in subsequent observation sessions. Eventually, I stopped the stimulated recall interviews because of the discomfort they might have caused my participants.

Nevertheless, some of the students who knew my background and were already in contact with me would voluntarily inform me about certain events, even in sessions that I did not attend. I included these data as field notes.

In the following subsection, I present my collection and use of field notes during data collection.

4.3.3. Field Notes

Bryman (2012, p. 447) defines field notes as 'fairly detailed summaries of events and behaviour and the researcher's initial reflections on them'. Field notes are any written notes in the field. My field notes covered informal chats with students and teachers, my reflections on incidents and events that occurred during and after data collection, peripheral notes aligned with classroom observations and emotional aspects related to participants during dyadic interactions, interviews and classroom observation.

Similarly, field notes can include the researcher's personal diary, which Bernard (2013, p. 347) refers to as 'a place where you can run and hide when things get tough. ... a diary chronicles how you feel and how you perceive your relations with others around you'.

I did not use a formal diary. I had a small notebook where I jotted ideas and personal reflections while in the field. Although I tried to follow Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) emphasis on writing field notes immediately after an incident was observed, this was not always possible in the field. I would type brief notes on my phone to remind myself of what was happening. Later, whenever I had time, I would write down everything I could remember about what participants said and describe the events as accurately as I could.

To decide what to consider field notes and what was relevant to the study is very important, especially for beginning researchers. Like what I experienced in the first sessions of classroom observation, I tended to write about everything I saw or experienced during my day.

In this thesis, I use mostly the terms informal chats and informal interviews. Selleck (2017) refers to them, 'ethnographic chats'. This ethnographic protocol, mentioned by Selleck (2017), aims to minimise researchers' influence on participants, empower participants' involvement and voice in the research and avoid partiality in participant responses, i.e., be inclusive to all sorts of contributions. This resulted in lengthy written oral accounts that were difficult to reflect on, especially as attending observation sessions and chatting with

participants all day left me exhausted and unable to reflect on the data I gathered during the day. It took me a couple of days to develop a routine of collecting and reflecting on data. Therefore, determining the quality of the data I was gathering and organising as field notes was very important because it could eventually influence my in-depth analysis.

In the same vein, Bernard (2013) defines three other types of field notes that researchers can use: methodological, descriptive and analytic notes. The first deals with techniques in collecting data, the second deals with the details of behaviour and environment and the last deals with the researcher's understanding of the culture being studied or the complex nature of an incident that needs time and thinking to be deconstructed.

In this study, field notes were detailed descriptions of the different learning environments in which interactions occurred. This includes any events, group dynamics, topics for discussion, teacher–student and student–student rapport and interactions, turn-taking, informal chats and other issues relevant to the study.

As already mentioned in my descriptions of classroom observation and interviews, methodological notes helped me identify my position during the incidents that occurred during data collection. I could reflect on the roles I took and infer changes to my position or how I proceeded with certain instruments. An example can be drawn from the stimulated recall interviews; methodological field notes allowed me to reflect on students' reactivity and discomfort with that method. As the study progressed, my field notes became less descriptive and more analytical.

In addition to field notes, students' diaries were very rich sources of data.

4.3.4. Students' Diaries

My first plan to use students' diaries as a research tool was to ask students who gave their consent to keep diaries and note down the events when they perceive themselves as silently engaged in the classroom. I aimed to understand their feelings and interpretations of classroom events without the burden of being recorded or asked to engage orally in a discussion. Students' diaries tend to be moderately less obtrusive, especially to students who tended to be disengaged orally and those who struggled to communicate their views publicly. Twenty students consented to write diaries.

Using students' diaries offered me insights into the participants' feelings, some of their unspoken struggles and their opinions and views regarding classroom participation. Dornyei

(2007, p. 156) points out that 'diaries offer the opportunity to investigate social, psychological, and physiological processes within everyday situations' and they also 'focus either on unfolding dynamic phenomena or on specific (and often rare) events' (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 591).

While having informal conversations with some students, I presented the idea of the diary and how it could be helpful for this study. As mentioned in the participant section 4.2.2. many students refused to take part.

Then, I realised that approaching students immediately after observing them in the classroom made them reactive and feel on the spot. I was also aware that diaries might impose a burden on the participants because they had to allocate time and energy to write them, as well as on the researcher because they are time-consuming to process and issues of retention and participants' withdrawal without notice might arise (Sheble & Wildemuth, 2009). Therefore, a teacher offered to ask her students to keep diaries. I explained the research to them, asked for their consent and assured them that their participation was voluntary and would not be taken into consideration for course assessment or extra credit. I also ensured that they did not write their names on their diaries as their teacher would collect them.

Students were asked to write diary entries after sessions. Cohen and Hosenfeld (1981) distinguish three similar types of diaries: introspection, during an event; immediate retrospection, directly after an event, and delayed retrospection, hours after the event.

Considering the difficulties of introspection and the pressure of immediate retrospection, students had the freedom to write their diaries after the ends of sessions and were allowed to keep them and return them on the following day.

Following Dornyei's (2007, p. 159) practical points to facilitate the use of diaries, I included some questions to help students structure their thoughts. I avoided regular check-ups or rewards because I perceived check-ups as intrusive on the students' space and rewards would make students reactive and competitive in writing the diaries.

Through diaries, I gained insight into participants' psychological and emotional states, which cannot be observed through their behaviour. Participants wrote about their feelings openly and shared personal experiences. Data gathered from diaries were different from those gathered via other instruments in the sense that participants were completely anonymous, provided information loaded with emotion, and could criticise certain behaviours and comportments.

According to Dornyei (2007, p. 157), the strengths of diary studies lie in being an unobtrusive way of studying people. They give an insider account where participants describe and interpret their own behaviour, and they collect data on many occasions from the same individuals.

Students were permitted to write in the language they preferred as well as choose the form in which they wanted to write: hard copy, electronic diaries, or e-mail. Most students wrote in English on paper. One student wrote in Arabic, and two chose to send their diaries via Facebook Messenger.

The paper diary I provided included directions in the form of three questions to allow students to write in as much specific detail as possible and avoid general summaries (see appendix 4).

4.4. Data Analysis

This section starts with an overview of the data analysis process and then moves to how different themes were generated through a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Clark & Braun, 2019).

4.4.1. Overview of the Data Analysis Process

Patton (2002, p. 434) describes qualitative analysis as

> A new stage of field work in which analysts must observe their own processes even as they are doing the analysis…in the field work, ideas about directions for analysis will occur. Patterns take shape. Possible themes spring to mind… ideas for making sense of the data that emerge while still in the field constitute the beginning of analysis.

At first, I was acquainted with Dornyei's (2007, p. 244) concepts of 'formalised analytical procedures', which offer a step-by-step process to generate meaning from data with a fluid flexibility and openness in the process that is subjective. However, while collecting data, it seemed impossible to follow a formalised procedure. With that in mind, analysis was an important part of my data collection process. The analysis was mainly done mentally, and sometimes I jotted it down in my notebook. This allowed me to explore certain topics in greater detail with my participants, ask more and understand better.

The process, therefore, was iterative and cyclical in the sense that I moved back and forth between data, analytical notes and themes. This approach allowed me to iteratively re-

evaluate the early stages of analysis and reflect on the development of my analytical voice regarding the themes.

Therefore, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, in addition to participants' interpretations, there was a second level of me interpreting participants' interpretations and then locating those interpretations within scientific frameworks. Thus, I would describe my approach as reflexive in nature, following Braun and Clark's (2019) approach of reflexive thematic analysis, which is 'the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594).

I based my labelling of titles and sections on my data-driven judgements. This was only possible because of the amount of data gathered and my engagement in the interpretation process. Applying interpretivism was a key factor in the analysis stage.

4.4.2. Making Sense of the Data

To proceed with the analysis, I allowed myself to view each piece of data through multiple analytical lenses to make sense of the different interpretations that participants provided. At times, participants' accounts seemed paradoxical and inconsistent. Moreover, dealing with teachers and students in a classroom research study left me with pedagogical conflicts.

Among the inconsistencies and paradoxes that seemed to recur while analysing the data was, for instance, a student who labelled herself silent based on how she perceived herself in a learning environment would soon after alter her label to fit another learning environment. The settings and the time at which students' statements were produced significantly affected their negotiation and choice to speak about their learning identities.

Having analysed the data, writing it up was equally challenging. In the next subsection, I explain the process of labelling and analysing the data.

4.4.3. The Data Analysis Process

In the field, I reviewed my classroom observation notes, field notes and diaries regularly. I transcribed the interviews after fieldwork ended and transferred the diaries into Microsoft Word. This stage of 'pre-coding' (Dornyei, 2007; Saldaña, 2013; Aurini, Heath & Howells, 2016) allowed me to immerse myself critically in the data and develop a holistic view of the patterns across the texts.

I labelled all of the data documents with identifying codes that I placed in brackets: interviewees were coded by their pseudonyms followed by codes for the type of interview, e.g., (Sanaa, Student Formal Interview); classroom observation codes included the module and day of observation; field notes were followed by a description of the note type, e.g., (Field notes, Informal Chat) and students' diaries were labelled with numbers 1–20, e.g., (Student Diary 1).

I consider the process of pre-coding part of the 'familiarisation' stage (Braun & Clark, 2006; Robson & McCartan, 2016) with data. I became acquainted with the concepts and patterns immersed within my data.

Next, I conducted 'holistic coding' (Dey, 1993), during which I thoroughly read units of data, gaining a sense of the overall content. This progressed to include full transcripts and then semantic and latent coding were utilised. According to Byrne (2022, p. 7):

> The production of semantic codes can be described as a descriptive analysis of the data, aimed solely at presenting the content of the data as communicated by the respondent. Latent coding goes beyond the descriptive level of the data and attempts to identify hidden meanings or underlying assumptions, ideas, or ideologies that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data.

At this stage, I started including memos next to the data. Dornyei (2007, p. 254) explains 'memos are in effect exploration of ideas, hunches, and thoughts about the codes'. Memos allowed me to engage in reflection on the 'coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data'. (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44). Memos, therefore, constituted my reflections, initial analysis and initial holistic reading of the data.

Next, I highlighted key concepts and identified recurring themes in the data. I labelled passages of data with their ideas or events. I consider this stage an aspect of theme development. I continued to use analytical memos as they helped me record the development of the labels and meanings assigned to units of data and codes. This recursive process led me to rely on latent coding. This process aligns with Clark and Braun's (2021) statement:

> In reflexive TA, codes are never finally fixed. They can evolve, expand, contract, be renamed, split apart into several codes, collapsed together with other codes, and even be abandoned. Coding can and often does become more interpretive and conceptual across an analysis, moving beyond surface and explicit meaning to interrogate implicit

(latent) meaning. Such developments and refinements reflect the researcher's deepening engagement with their data and their evolving, situated, reflexive, interpretation of them (p. 207).

Generating final themes was a lengthy process that followed Clark and Braun (2021): 'the coding process is integral to theme development, in the sense that themes are an 'outcome' of these coding and theme development processes, are developed through coding; coding is not – in general – a process for finding evidence for pre-conceptualised themes' (p. 332).

Themes were not assigned definite titles or labels; they were continuously revised and refined during the writing process as part of the dialogue between my voice and the data.

I should note that I was aware of the impact that a researcher brings to their research, as Holliday (2016) warns:

> Researchers need to be aware and honest about the influence they bring to their thematic analysis from their original preoccupations, where the themes themselves, although emergent, are also influenced by questions or issues that the researcher brought to the research (p. 105-106).

My awareness of my positionality during data analysis allowed the process to be data-driven. The interpretive nature of this study celebrates the account of participants' views and experiences; therefore, I was mindful that the data analysis was about reporting participants' voices through my own voice.

This course of analysis resulted in three data chapters in this thesis: chapters five, six and seven.

4.5. Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is the process of locating myself, my interpretations and my biases and thinking of how my research can benefit from my maturation as a researcher.

Berger (2013, p. 220) defines reflexivity as:

> The self-appraisal in research. It means turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation.

Reflexivity in this study covers how my thinking progressed, how elements of my research have been negotiated and adapted, like the research instruments, and how my role in the field changed during data collection.

Following an interpretive approach, the researcher is one of the instruments used for data collection. The researcher cannot alienate their biographical and historical repertoires from the field as 'no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher and we cannot separate self from those activities in which we are intimately involved' (Sword, 1999, p. 277). Therefore, I now present my positionality and the reflexive process I experienced while conducting this study.

4.5.1. About My Assumptions

I started this study with the assumption that students become silent in the classroom due to teachers' approaches and behaviour. I regarded students' silence as a reaction to teachers' authority. The idea that silence did not equal passiveness remained the major fixed premise of this research.

While advancing in literature writing, I found myself easily persuaded of some grand narratives and claims, such as that Western classrooms are communicative in nature, and silence often indicates passivity. I assumed that Algerian classrooms were heavily influenced by these Western methodologies. Now, I question what I meant by Western methodologies; I would instead name them English language teaching methodologies.

During my master's degree, I came across a variety of English language teaching methodologies that were never referred to as Western. However, we hardly ever paid attention to the environments of learning, the ecology of the classroom and the context. We learnt about these teaching methodologies with minimal critique of their adaptation to our teaching practice. An anecdote reminds me of when I asked middle-school teachers about the methods they used in teaching English with reference to the communicative language teaching approach and competency-based approach. Most teachers wondered what these methods were, and one teacher answered me that teachers use what they see fit and claimed that teaching evolves by experience and not by theory. At the time, we chose to ignore his statement because it reflected ignorance towards scholarly established teaching methods. Now, I am aware that the local perspective on teaching can vary based on the learning environment.

The literature on students' silence addresses Western vs non-Western or Eastern methodologies. At the beginning of conducting this research, I tried to fit my understanding of the context where I would conduct my research within that discussion. So, Western and non-Western methodologies, ideologies, identities and social norms all seemed to dynamically interfere with my topic.

When I started data collection, my notes were void of any methodological interpretations that could be linked to a certain teaching methodology, except for when teachers deliberately referred to them. The data I gathered covered teachers' practices, students' behaviour, how teachers treated their students, the expectations from learning, language assessment and forms of participation.

I believe that my reflexive practice evolved mostly at that stage. I started looking beyond the written data and exploring the social and cultural repertoires that my participants embodied in their answers. In other words, the researcher effect is not present only in the process of gathering the data but extends to the interpretations of findings. Reflexivity is an ongoing process that requires the researcher to be aware of their impact upon the research before entering the field, while there and after data collection ends.

Hibbert et al., (2010, p. 48) believe that reflection, reflexivity and recursion are interconnected practices in research. They state that:

> Reflexivity suggests a complexification of thinking and experience or thinking about experience. Thus, we regard reflexivity as a process of exposing or questioning our ways of doing ... through questioning the bases of our interpretations, reflexivity necessarily brings about change in the process of reflection – it is thereby recursive.

The recursive process of reflexivity brought me to negotiate the Western TESOL methodology in the context of my research, the flawed professionalism or simply a local professionalism that meets the socio-cultural expectations of the participants.

4.5.2. About Positions and Roles in the Setting

For some participants and university staff, I was like any other student at the university. However, for some others, I found myself dealing with student participants who treated me like an elite 'teacher' from the UK; some of my former teachers perceived me as their silent graduate student, while others treated me as a doctorate researcher and some viewed me as

a colleague. My positions were influenced by the people around me; I remained in the position of a researcher, but I embodied other roles when required.

I assured my participants that my research aimed to understand their experiences and discover their views regarding classroom silence and oral participation. Assuring participants, mainly students, that their participation was voluntary and that I was a researcher, not a journalist or someone who would post their views on social media, was important. Therefore, my roles and the positions that participants ascribed to me may have affected data collection. However, I am also aware that this impact did not affect the validity of the data.

4.5.3. About Methodology

The reflexive process regarding the use of instruments has been reviewed in detail in previous sections. It is worth mentioning that I was aware of the impact I had on the observation process. In classroom observations, my presence might have influenced teachers' instruction; they might have used different methods or instructional strategies. Additionally, students who were aware of my research aims tried to participate often, as Monahan and Fisher (2010, p. 2) noted, people who are observed tend to perform 'more efficiently'.

In stimulated recall interviews, I mentioned that students refused to be labelled silent, and hesitated to engage in discussions that involved me describing their behaviour. Therefore, I stopped the stimulated recall interviews because I found them intrusive to students' comfort. Furthermore, students who engaged in stimulated recall interviews showed high reactivity in their classroom behaviour afterwards.

4.6. Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

This section presents the ethical considerations for this study, followed by its trustworthiness and justifications for the representation and use of data. Last, it discusses the limitations of the research methodology.

4.6.1. Ethical Considerations

Generally, ethical considerations arise from researchers reflecting on the problems encountered in their studies (Hammersley, 2017, p. 57).

According to Cohen et al. (2018), 'ethical research concerns what researchers ought and ought not to do in their research and research behaviour' (p. 111). Put simply, this follows the credo 'do no harm' to the research participants.

I proceeded in this study with the four guidelines of research ethics Tracy (2010) suggests. She places ethics among eight other important criteria for high-quality qualitative research. She argues that ethics in research must consider procedural ethics, situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics and exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research).

First, procedural ethics are the kind posed by institutional review board (IRB) committees to guarantee adequate procedures, mainly informed consent, causing no harm and no deception, confidentiality and protecting privacy (Tracy, 2010; Ellis; 2007, Sales & Folkman, 2000). At the outset, this research was reviewed by the ethical committee at Canterbury Christ Church University and approved. Before applying for ethical approval, I contacted the head of the school in Algeria and explained my research and the targeted sample for the study. This letter was also used to reach out to teachers and gain their approval to conduct classroom observations.

Second, situational ethics refer to ethical practices emerging from context-specific circumstances. Situational ethics deal with 'the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field' (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). This means being cautious about one's behaviour and maintaining an acceptable norm of conduct in the field. This suggests that 'ethical decisions should be based on the particularities of a scene' (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). In the context of this study, situational ethics were not prioritised simply because I had access to the field, participants gave their consent and were aware of the aims of the research, and all data were gathered on-site.

Third, relational ethics 'recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work' (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, this is about the researcher being aware of the bonds that are created between them and the participants and the extent to which their relation affects their decisions regarding the research. The ethnographic nature of the study allowed me to accompany participants daily, especially students.

Finally, exiting ethics, which are mainly concerned with the outcome of research. In other words, these address how data are presented to the public.

During data collection, I faced no issues with access; I could enter the university and classes with no restrictions. I was never asked to provide my identity card at the gates, and I was never asked by teachers whether I had formal permission to access their classes. Nevertheless, I informed and presented the entry letter to teachers on every occasion.

A particular member of the university staff was a key point of contact between me and my participants. He arranged classrooms for teachers' interviews and provided me with information on students' and teachers' timetables. He can be considered the gatekeeper as his role facilitated access to the study settings and participants.

For all classroom observations, I sought oral consent in agreement with the teachers. I explained my role and research objectives. For the interviews and diaries, I handed out written consent forms and an information sheet and explained the nature and purpose of the research to participants in English and Arabic when necessary. I informed participants that their participation was absolutely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any point. All of my contact details were available for any participant queries.

Data collection started weeks before the presidential elections in Algeria. Some participants were sceptical of writing their names and details down, therefore, they offered oral consent that was recorded before the start of the interview or informal chats.

To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, I asked participants to provide pseudonyms to use instead of their real names. Patton (2002, p. 411) explains that 'researchers have been advised to disguise the locations of their fieldwork and change the names of respondents, usually giving them pseudonyms, as a way of protecting their identity'.

I also avoided revealing any of my own views on my topic or how I perceived the events that occurred in the field. I mainly assured all participants that my work dealt with providing ethnographic insights about classroom silence and that my role was not to judge or assess behaviour or views.

4.6.2. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as 'that quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences' (Schwandt, 2001, p. 258). In this study, I aimed to present findings that were embedded in participants' experiences. I provided a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the research process and reflections on my positionality and subjectivity, as

discussed in the section 4.5. on reflexivity. This helped me remain aware of my impact on the data collection and analysis processes.

In the findings chapters and this chapter, I present a detailed analysis from participants as well as the steps I took to collect and analyse the data. I used member checking by providing participants with interview transcripts, highlighted passages that were in Arabic and their translations in English and shared my interpretation and analysis of the data. This, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314), 'is the most critical technique for establishing credibility'. Also, the interpretive nature of the study required participants to evaluate 'how well the ongoing data analysis represents their experience' (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206). On several occasions, I had instances of confusion about participants' experiences being silent in different learning environments; for example, Sanaa mentioned in both the formal interview and informal chats that she has always been silent since primary school. Then, by the end of the interview, she claimed that she is no longer silent. To understand her experience, I had to understand when she was not silent and why she would adopt these two positions. After contacting her, she explained that the nature of formal classrooms and informal classrooms made her change her perception of silence and participation. Therefore, the element of member checking was important to maintain participants' accounts of their experiences and better position them within a scientific framework.

Additionally, supervisors and colleagues acted as 'external audits' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). They read my analysis and provided their views on the themes and arguments. Data were anonymised before being shared with supervisors and colleagues.

I used thick descriptions to describe the setting, atmosphere, teachers and students' movements and classroom sitting arrangement; this element is also referred to as transferability.

4.7. Challenges Encountered

During any empirical study, the researcher may encounter challenges while trying to push the boundaries of knowledge, and this study is no exception. First, the literature on silence as a tool for communication and classroom silence as a problematic phenomenon was overwhelming, given the numerous academic publications on silence and other related classroom phenomena. To my knowledge, there are also no studies on the meanings associated with silence in the Algerian community. My first challenge, in the first year of

my PhD studies, was to understand the meanings associated with silence as a communicative tool and select the aspect of silence I wished to prioritise. To solve this challenge, I took notes on my reading and shared them with my supervisor and colleagues regularly. Eventually, after my six-month periodic review, I developed a clear vision regarding my reading priorities.

Second, I explained previously that assigning participants for my study was one of the challenges I encountered during data collection. I was not certain how participants would respond to my invitation for interviews considering their silence in the classroom. I addressed this challenge by attending many classroom observation sessions to make participants comfortable with my presence, improving the clarity of the interview questions, and making myself accessible at any time for questions or small chats. These options provided participants with a sense of proximity and allowed them to behave naturally.

Third, making sense of the research findings was challenging. As mentioned, my focus at the beginning of the study did not include students' learning identities. I only became aware of the different identities my participants exhibited through their stories during my third year. The challenge this presented was two-fold: I had to read and acquaint myself with the notions of learner identity and amend my data analysis and literature review chapters. This resulted in requesting additional time to meet these requirements.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter presented the research assumptions that guide the present study as well as an overview of approaches and methods for the study of students' classroom silence and participation. After formulating my research questions, I concluded that the most appropriate research design for my study was a focused ethnography and opted for classroom observations, interviews, field notes and students' diaries as suitable data collection methods. A rationale for each of the chosen methods was presented along with a description of their strengths and limitations. Details about the use of these methods and the challenges encountered were also outlined. In addition, this chapter introduced the setting and the participants. After that, this chapter presented the process of data analysis stage and my reflexivity and positionality. Ethical considerations were discussed along with strategies to ensure participant confidentiality. Finally, I presented the strategies employed in order to comply with research trustworthiness and highlighted some of the challenges that I encountered.

Chapter 5

Initial understandings of the different perceptions of classroom silence and silent students in the language classroom.

5. Introduction

This chapter presents analysis and discussion of the findings on participants' perceptions of classroom silence. These results give a general picture on the reasons which are both individualistic stemming from psychological attributes and learning experiences and some shared factors which are found more common in the setting. This chapter sets forward the different learning positions that silent students can be having in the classroom and how these positions were altered within different learning environments.

This chapter is divided into five sections. I start this chapter with how students regard the course content and how their interests or lack of interests in a lesson can affect their learning positions, section 5.1. It is a common reason for many participants that if an individual is uninterested in a topic of a discussion, he/she will not speak. Also, students who appeared to be silent in lessons which they perceived 'irrelevant' or 'uninteresting' were observed to be talkative students in other sessions. Then, in section 5.2 I cover the effects of different formal and non-formal learning environments on students' perceptions of their silence and how they alter their silent position in non-formal environments. In this section, the content of lessons, the role of teachers and students' academic level appear to be the driving reasons for students to be silent or non-silent. As the role of teachers is found critical for many silent students, section 5.1.1 and section 5.2 discusses how students move from a talkative position to a silent position and vice versa because of the behaviour of some of their teachers. After that, in section 5.3, I explain students' different perceptions of self and their academic ability and finally, I put forward the findings which cover teachers' perceptions of classroom silence which appear to be mostly negative. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the findings and explain how these silent students altered their learning positions and unknowingly negotiated their silent learning identity.

5.1. 'I need to learn new things': Content relevance for students

Many students appear to be unsatisfied with the content of lessons when they cannot recognise its value for their learning. Data show that many lessons are delivered through perceived tedious teaching strategies where the expectations and interests of students are not taken into consideration. Students in general are observed to take a silent position when unsatisfied with lesson content, and silent students in particular were sometimes observed to break the prolonged silence and engage orally when more talkative students chose to resort to silence.

Many silent and non-silent students considered their silence to be a form of resistance to lesson content which does not match their learning interests. A female student whom I observed participating and dominating a lesson of literary analysis expressed her frustration about the content of the oral production module where she totally disengaged from participation. Aya, commenting on her silence in the session: 'I know these things, for me I need to learn new things, exciting things about English. I don't care about idioms; we have already studied them last year' (Aya. Student Stimulated Recall Interview). Based on Aya's comments, the lesson was perceived incompatible for second year students.

Sanaa agreed: 'sometimes there are random topics for discussion, things that are not really interesting in a certain way, I feel like we should focus on important things.' (Sanaa. S Formal Interview). Anne shared a similar view and claimed that she withdraws from participation because the content is basic and naive: 'when the teacher asks something and I don't answer, it not because I don't know the answer but since they all know it, I feel like it's stupid of me to say it. I keep saying let's skip it and move to something else, something more interesting.' (Anne. Student Formal Interview).

Interestingly, the value which students placed upon the relevance of content for their learning reflects their eagerness to learn, their silent engagement, and also shows a high-level of students' expectations regarding the curriculum.

To illustrate this point, an opposing view shows that silent students can feel triggered to participate when other students either struggle to answer questions or are perceived uninterested. Rima who is represented in this study as a silent student said: 'it's easy for me to participate when they don't answer the teacher, so I feel obliged to answer so we can move on to something else.' (Rima. Student Formal Interview). Many students who were observed orally disengaged, proved on many occasions their cognitive engagement no matter how the content is perceived.

Another student who appeared distracted by his smartphone and totally disengaged from the lesson, answered the teacher's question when his classmates failed to answer:

> Two males with their heads bowed down on a smartphone, probably they were playing a game. The teacher had asked about the lexicons which show Robinson Crusoe's struggle and conflict with nature. Students answered her questions but there were still few other words that the teacher needed them to recall. The male student, without raising his hand and without fully losing sight on the game answered with an audible voice: shipwreck, the storm, the swelling of the tide. The teacher approved the answer and pressed on her computer to switch the power point slide when suddenly a female student (Aya) in the front shouted: But miss, I said the storm first. (Classroom Observation. Literary Analysis. December 2019).

This extract shadows the challenges faced by teachers and observers in identifying and understanding the silence of students. It could easily be assumed that the student was disengaged from the lesson if he did not participate when others could not find the answer. His behaviour shows lack of interest; he did not raise his hand to speak as others were doing and continued on using his smartphone in front of the teacher. However, his correct answer explains that he was attentive to the teacher and his classmates' answers and shows his intolerance of the prolonged silence which was taking place.

To sum up, I believe that many students struggle to understand the relevance of the course content for their learning because the aims of lessons are not communicated to students in the beginning of a session. Students can use silence to express their lack of interest in a lesson as in the case of Anne or resistance as in the case of Aya. What seems interesting is that silent students can break the prolonged silence when other students withdraw from oral participation. This leads to claim that prolonged silence in the classroom is perceived negatively as it impedes the development of students' learning.

Next, I present an experience which I had with a group that I observed on several occasions to be silent and unresponsive.

5.1.1. Is it about the content or about the teacher?

Silence can be manifested collectively when the whole classroom small groups within a classroom disengage from oral participation. I observed group five for eight sessions with three different teachers. I considered them an exception as compared to other groups that I observed because there was collective silence, extreme lack of oral engagement with

teachers and peers, and all students I approached for interviews refused to take part in the study. Their oral participation was merely short answers to direct questions or prompts. I also observed that teachers made little efforts to engage them orally in discussions and lessons were delivered in a lecturing style.

The following extract explains how this group attitudes changed in a session that I led for 40 minutes. Their teacher asked me to stay with the students while she went out, and the lesson which was being delivered I had already observed with another teacher (Israa). I built on my previous experience, observation notes and purposefully used self-disclosure and tried to connect the content of the lesson to their experiences. I also tried to maintain their attention through asking questions throughout the discussion about the speakers' accents, language formality and vocabulary meaning, things that are among the interests of language learners.

> The Oral Production teacher asked me to stay with her students for a couple of minutes while she was asked to go to the administration. She was absent for about 40 minutes. Students already knew that I am a PhD student and were familiar with me as I attended many sessions with them. Before going, the teacher asked me to play two YouTube videos which revolved around the experience of American homeless people and how they ended up on streets.
>
> Another teacher who works in the administration came seconds after she left to check on them and said [*In Arabic*]: 'oh! you are here, they are all yours, stay with them'.
>
> I played the first video twice and then I felt that students are not interested to hear it for a third time. I told them that they should listen to what the first man in the video is saying and then we shall discuss his experience all together.
>
> I played the video again and there were students writing down what the man was saying. After few seconds, I asked about what he said; they all spoke simultaneously without raising their hands. I was stressed because I did not want to stop them but at the same time, I could not listen to all of them at once. I then asked them to listen to each other and speak one by one. Some students raised their hands, I gave permission to a male student and after that the second student and the third spoke and so on without asking for my permission, but they waited for the one who was speaking to finish.
>
> In each chunk of the video, I asked them whether they know a person who went through the same struggle as losing a job, going through divorce, experiencing mental break down... etc. These were my leading questions, but they took control over the whole discussion, they waited for each other to finish talking so another one would start. Sometimes the discussion became off-topic, for instance: they talked about how

depressing it is to be fired, losing one's home and getting divorce to whether anyone has experienced depression. I did not interfere while they were self-enclosing some of their personal experiences as they seemed interested to listen to each other, and most importantly all students were speaking in English and occasionally asked me to translate some words from Arabic to English. The classroom was somehow noisy. Suddenly their teacher came in, they stopped the discussion immediately. I went back to my seat and noticed that the dynamics went back to what it was before, they all resorted to silence again. The teacher grabbed a paper from her bag and started from the beginning without asking me about what we did.' (Classroom Observation. January. 2020)

Reflecting on this incident made me wonder why students changed their comportment during this session. These students can communicate in English, set arguments, defend their position, and seek to learn by continuously asking me questions. I could find two explanations: the first is that the way I delivered the lesson of that module specifically was different from how their teacher's. I shared my opinion, asked for theirs, and allowed them some time and space to think. I did not limit their answers because I was not following a lesson plan. For me it was an open discussion which is guided by some questions and prompts. The second explanation could be that I do not have the profile of a teacher, so the whole interaction was not formalised into a teacher-student interaction.

The second explanation could be more accurate because they delved again into silence once their teacher entered to the classroom. This will be discussed thoroughly in sections 5.2.1, 5.3 and 5.3.1. on the role of the teacher in students' silence.

Here I give one more example of the same teacher with the same group in a former session that I had observed:

In a lesson about idiomatic expressions, students had papers which were given by the teacher. On the papers there were synonyms and definitions of some idiomatic expressions. While students were asked to provide synonyms from that paper. One male student provided an additional synonym to "climb the ladder of success". The teacher answered him: Please, let's stick to what is on the paper. (Observation session. Oral Production. Jan 2020)

In this event, the teacher restricted the student's answer to the words already provided on the paper. The teacher might be constrained by the time; however, I believe that some students may lose interest in the lesson because of the limited opportunities offered for them to express themselves, knowledge, and interests.

The session that had with group five shows that students can develop interest in the content when they are allowed to connect the lesson to their real-life situations. I also noticed that they asked me to translate words instead of using their smartphones. This can indicate their eagerness to remain orally engaged. In this incident, group five classroom culture experienced four main changes: the teacher, the question strategies, connecting the content to real life experiences and allowing students to take charge of their participation. Further evidence is discussed in sections 5.3. and 6.1.1. I Thus I believe that students can be silent when they do not understand the relevance a lesson content to their learning, and I believe that students can change their positions within one session and one lesson depending on the contextual factors. In such case the role of the teacher was the element who made students interact orally.

Also, this group of students despite being silent for more than eight sessions that I observed could easily start a discussion and share their opinions and experiences in English which indicates that they do not lack language skills or competence and that first assumptions can be misleading when it comes to students' silence.

Knoster and Goodboy (2021) study on the impact of content relevance and relevant teaching on students' learning conclude that 'instructors who strive to teach content in a relevant manner are able to better facilitate positive affective responses from their students and thereby stimulate students' cognitive engagement in the learning process.' (p.20). They assert that teachers need to take into consideration students' needs and interests when delivering lessons. Also, the first two cases showed that content can be repetitive which means that students do not feel that they are learning new things.

The following section discusses silent students' perceptions of their silence within different learning environments notably formal and informal classes where the content, teachers' instructional strategies and relationships with peers are claimed to be distinct.

5.2. 'No longer silent': Informal classrooms and developing different self-concepts

One of the main explanations attributed to classroom silence expressed by several students encompasses the differences between formal classrooms in contrast to informal classrooms

like CEIL6 and their impact on students' self-concept. It is first important to define the concepts of informal learning and self- concept. I hereby follow Davies & Eynon (2015) who conceives informal learning as 'what happens outside the structures and boundaries of formal education' (p.330) and Mercer's (2011) definition of foreign language learning self-concept as 'an individual's self-descriptions of competence and evaluative feelings about themselves as a Foreign Language (FL) learner' (p.14).

Although in data collection most of the students referred to formal and informal classrooms as two distinct environments, their perceptions about participation in CEIL showed that positive experiences can influence their foreign language self-concept, more precisely, the silent student concept.

In this extract, Sanaa described her current self-concept as a result of the learning experience she had in CEIL:

> Now, I kind of opened up a little bit than what I used to be, especially this year I guess, we did CEIL last year, the final level C2, and that was very helpful, I was able to express myself, express my thoughts, be more open. (Sanaa. Field notes. Inf Chat)

Sanaa associated attending CEIL classes with developing her self-expression skills and thus she started negotiating her self-concept. She believes that the CEIL learning environment helped her feel at ease with speaking and self-expression. I shall now explain how I believe Sanaa's self-concept has changed and been impacted by her engagement in the research and in the informal classes that she attended.

I first met Sanaa in a classroom observation where she was silent. I approached her to ask about her impressions regarding the lesson, I explained my research and then asked her whether she wants to be part of the study. She accepted and said: 'I think I'll win the first prize [referring to her silence in the classroom] (Sanaa. Field notes. Inf Chat).

She explained that she has always been a silent student since primary school as shall be discussed in section 5.2.1. She talked to me about her achievements in exams, high grades and her keenness to learn English since middle school. She appeared invested in her learning and in the university social life as she was a member of two clubs at university which

6 CEIL (Centre d'Enseignement Intensif des Langues) : Intensive languages teaching centre : it aims to teach foreign languages (English, French, Spanish, Turkish, German, Chinese… etc) Teachers are usually graduating students. CEIL is open for all people being students, professionals or lay people.

organise events such as motivational speeches. Her profile as a language student did not seem to be shy or unconfident when using English.

At the end of the formal interview which took place a month after our first meeting, I asked Sanaa again whether she perceives herself as silent: '[she nodded her head left and right and released a sigh] Hopefully not any more or not that much anymore, I'm better than how I was before!' (Sanaa, Formal Interview).

Sanaa previously used 'opened up a little bit' and after that used 'I'm better than how I was before'. She shows that she has two positions: one when she perceived herself silent and the second is when she started negotiating her position and claiming that 'hopefully not anymore' silent. She did not refute the label silent; she could feel that her engagement in that environment made her change.

Wissam contrarily refused to be called silent although she accepted to be involved in this study as a silent student. She first claimed that silence is a natural attribute in some individuals: 'When I'll be a teacher, I would respect the choice of my students who want to be silent, because it's in them, they can't control it, and it's in their nature' (Wissam. Student Formal Interview). She, like Sanaa, were among the students who represented themselves using 'I am silent'. However, her answer to whether she still perceives herself silent at the end of the interview and after talking about her CEL experience where she believes had a great impact on the way they perceived themselves, she said:

'Not really; I am no longer silent. I kept telling myself that I have to try, I had to. I don't have a choice, it's important, participation is important' (Wissam, Student Formal Interview).

To better understand silent students' experiences within formal and informal learning environments, I had to widen my scope of interviews and ask other students who attended CEIL classes about their experiences.

Many students claim that they participate more in CEIL classes as compared to their formal classes due to a set of reasons, notably: teachers are 'cool', students' level is similar, and no restrictions on speaking and participation. Some students even claim to perceive themselves differently in the two environments.

5.2.1. Claiming the differences between formal and informal classrooms

Participants appear to idealise informal learning classes. They mentioned three key elements which seem to make the difference between formal and informal learning environments: the teacher, students' level, and time and content dedicated for language practice. These elements seem to affect the atmosphere of the informal learning environment and students' participation.

1. The teacher

The first factor which most silent students who attended CEIL seem to recognise is the role of the teacher in informal learning environments. Salma who newly joined CEIL claimed that she perceives her oral participation differently in the two learning environments and mentioned the teacher as the first reason. She stated:

> I study CEIL in the same classroom where I study the other modules of my specialty [English], yet I feel that the classroom is so different. The teacher makes us feel that we can ask anything at anytime, she is open-hearted. You know, in western countries, in secondary schools for example, they group students who are advanced together and intermediates together etc. This helps teachers know how much efforts they should make to explain the lectures to students. This also help us [students] to feel comfortable in front of the teacher, because then there won't be students who try to show off in front of the teacher' (Salma. Fieldnotes- informal chat)

This argument was also stated by Wissam and Sanaa. I asked what is unique in CEIL that made them perceive themselves as "no longer silent". Their answers were:

Wissam: Because of the teacher we had in CEIL

Sanaa: Yeah, the teacher we had was amazing, phenomenal; she helped us be more expressive. We were not afraid of saying what we wanted to say...

Wissam: we felt really comfortable.

Me: So, is it the teacher who made you more expressive and less silent?

Sanaa: It's exactly the matter with all the students [referring to silent students]. If the teacher is really helpful, make you feel comfortable, when you make mistakes it's ok, then the student will be more open to learn, express, and give more, but when the teacher is like holding you back... [Shrugged her shoulders and sighed, then she stopped speaking] (Sanaa and Wissam. Field notes. Informal chat with students).

From the above data and the experience that I had with group five mentioned in section 5.1.1 students seemed to perceive the teachers differently in the formal and informal learning environments. This was also reflected in their oral participation and for some in their self-

concept. A student can perceive herself silent in a formal classroom and not silent in another classroom or with another teacher.

The role of a teacher in a non-formal environment seemed different than that in a formal learning environment for many students. Despite the variation between individual experiences, most students claimed that teachers in non-formal environments are easy going. Such claim is supported by the experience of Sanaa when she was still in primary school. She associated formal learning environments with teachers who can get abusive. She implied that being silent was a protecting mechanism that she followed for years to protect herself from a perceived anger. She narrated:

> It's always about the first experience with any teacher. For me, my first elementary school teacher was kind of abusive in a certain way or another. She didn't treat me well, not only me, I think, but many others. She was very mean, and you know as a child: I want to study, I want to discover, I want to do this and that. Suddenly, you are horrified by the teacher herself who is supposed to guide you towards what you want to reach in your journey, but instead, she did the opposite. So, it started from that moment, I had this kind of Phobia against teachers, and it stayed with me for this whole time (…) (Sanaa. Fieldnotes. Informal Chat)

Throughout her narration, it became clear why she distinguished between teachers in formal and informal learning environments. Such experience with a teacher can stay with a student for life. As a result of that experience, she became silent and even when sha started attending CEIL, it took her time to reposition herself and reformulate her self-concept that only at the end of our meeting that she could say 'I'm better than how I used to be'.

The image of formal learning environments seems to be perpetrated by students who had the opportunity to attend informal classes. I asked Salma to describe her participation in her usual classroom, she said:

> I find it difficult to speak in my usual class because I feel myself controlled that I should speak and sometimes I should not speak unless I am given permission. Also, the teacher sometimes explains things briefly because there are students who participate a lot, so she assumes that we have all understood, so it becomes difficult to ask questions. Another thing is even when I ask questions, she usually repeats what she has already said in English and does not make efforts to explain in in another way, however in CEIL, the teacher does everything she can to make me understand things. (Salma. Informal FB Chat)

Thus these data appear to indicate that students seem to take different positions regarding participation in formal and informal learning environments. Students perceive teachers in informal settings as facilitators more than controller. This initial data present the CEIL environment as supportive for self-expression and helpful as teachers are perceived more invested in meeting the learning needs of students.

2. *Students' level*

As mentioned in the literature review, peers sometimes tend to dominate, and steal turns from students who struggle to participate. Also, many students, as discussed in chapter seven, mentioned the attitudes of some students who show off and boast about their language fluency and accents. In the following extract, Salma mentioned that CEIL solved this issue by using attainment grouping:

> In CEIL, I don't feel the pressure to speak or to learn, I do it because I want to do it. In the other sessions, I always feel obliged to speak which makes me anxious. Also, in CEIL, we are grouped based on the level, I am B1 and all the other students who are with me are B1 even though they are way older than me like real men and women and some have degrees in architecture, law, medicine, but I feel like we are all the same. I can speak and ask whatever I want because I know that they won't laugh at me. (Salma. Informal FB Chat)

Again, I find this argument adding to the informal learning environment unthreatening atmosphere. Salma mentioned a sense of emotional security when studying around students who she believes are at the same level as her. Although there is a difference in age 'most students attending CEIL are born in the 80s and early 90s' (Field Notes. Taken from students' name list. B1 group), Salma found it easier to talk and participate in this environment.

The homogeneity of the group and classroom dynamics will be discussed further in chapter six and seven.

3. *Time and content for students' language practice*

Along similar lines, Salma mentioned that: 'In CEIL, we get to talk with each other, we ask questions, I personally asked my friend to explain something, and she did. The teacher did not ask us to be quiet or silent and there was not so much noise actually, although all students were chatting with each other' (Salma. Field notes Informal FB Chat)

What is apparent from Salma's distinctions between the formal classroom and the CEIL classroom is that she feels at ease in CEIL because she can speak, participate and ask questions without being afraid of negative judgement. The new learning environment allowed her also to develop new attitudes towards speaking and learning. She added: 'I feel more excited to do my homework of CEIL than doing my other homework which is actually more important for my grades' (Salma. Fieldnotes. Informal chat)

Salma could distinguish between the teachers' comportment, classroom dynamics and students' behaviour in the two learning environments because she experienced these elements for the first time that she could make a difference. This means that the thrill towards this change in the classroom culture is probably what is causing her to claim that she is not silent in CEIL as compared to the usual academic classroom.

Ihab is a student majoring in Biology who has no experience in formal language classes except those of high school and an ESP session once per-week. I asked him whether he found formal classes different than CEIL ones, she answered:

> I think that the major difference between any class and CEIL is how much time of the course is dedicated to practice instead of cruising through with a couple of examples. This is with regard to beginner and intermediate levels A1, A2, B1. As for relatively higher levels such as B2, the courses took a different turn towards more conversation and less instructional lessons. In C1 level, the courses were purely conversational. (Ihab. Fieldnotes. Informal Chat)

The intriguing element that Ihab could detect was the time offered for discussion and the nature of the conversational content.   Ihab mentioned that 'the teachers in CEIL intentionally open up debatable topics to lure everyone into speaking their mind and speaking their opinions regarding said matters' (Ihab. Fieldnote. Informal chat).

He continued:

> I think we tackled everything, I guess. There was a pull back from sexual subjects from the students' side themselves since most of us come from conservative background, but other than that a lot of touchy and sensitive subjects were brought up whether political, religious, racial, social... etc and that was an effective method I guess to get everyone out of their bubble and engage in conversation. All points of views were welcomed! (Ihab. Fieldnote. Informal Chat)

By taking Ihab's experience in CEIL and adding it to the other students who major in English like Sanaa, Wissam and Salma, I believe that the informal learning environment affect the way students perceive their classroom participation and the way they perceive themselves. I did not attend any observation in a CEIL classroom, however, from students' experiences it seems clear that they shift between two positions or two learning identities: one that is silent and one that is less silent.

The teacher, peers, and the nature of the content seem to be driving factors in students' negotiation of self-concept. These students' silence cannot be regarded as a stable state. It is rather the environment of learning which affects students' decisions upon speaking or retaining silence.

To conclude, I believe that student could negotiate their silent-self and maybe refuse being called "silent" because their notion of silence was initially linked to a confined environment where speaking is controlled by the teacher. These students could participate in CEIL classes which made them shift from perceiving themselves as silent to being 'opened-up', 'less silent' and 'self-expressing'. I did not refer to their proficiency level as their indicator for changing their perception as Sanaa, Salma and Wissam are competent users of the English language. I also believe that they could change their self-perception because they could negotiate and talk about it.

From a socio-psychological perspective, this can be explained as '*transition*' (Norton, 2006) in the '*sphere of experience*' (Zittoun, 2016). Generally, educational transitions are linked to the shifts between educational context such as high school to a different context like university or to a broader context like moving from one country to another. Transition affects students' identity construction as it builds on interactions between former experiences and new lived ones. As the sphere of this study is on students' choice to remain silent during classroom activities, these cases present the transition between two learning environments in the same institution. The main difference is the level of formality accorded to CEIL classrooms and the formal academic classrooms. Through the lenses of the new learning environment, students experience inner shifts where they reconstruct their sense of self, thus their silence and participation patterns. These findings align with Mercer (2011) who reported that learners' self-concept can be influenced by a set of factors, likely I mention: informal setting experiences like out-of-class language use, teaching style, having a new teacher, and previous learning experiences and many others. Also, she states that 'the period of transition does not primarily refer to change in external frames of reference … transition may

involve changes in either external, internal or, indeed, both frames of reference' (p. 154). She means by internal frames 'those centered within self' and external to 'stem from outside the individual' (p. 97)

It could be argued that the informal learning environment offered these students a learning experience that is less confined with rules, peers of all age groups, a matching level of language attainment, teachers who are relatively less controlling and content that is conversational in nature. The novelty of this learning experience can be argued to have attributed to the shift of these students' silent self-concept. Thus, the argument is that student can display different attitudes regarding talk and silence within different environments of learning.

These set of findings then challenge the perceived belief about silent students who are generally viewed having a fixed position or role that is of being silent and passive. These findings also seek to negotiate learners' positions within diverse learning environments and that the same students who represent themselves to be silent in a language classroom can negotiate their position and adopt a different one that might not be silent. In this section, the argument tackled informal learning environment that is of CEIL, however, what is important is how the teacher role, the content of lessons and students' level impacted the environment.

This leads to discuss the role of the teacher in facilitating and restricting the participation of students in the English language classroom.

5.3. 'My participation depends on the teacher' Teachers' behaviour in classroom

Adding to the features revered in informal learning environments and teachers' role in making the content relevant; teachers' behaviour with students was one of the strong claims that students mentioned regarding their classroom silence.

At the outset, when talking about being silent and its relationship with their English language teachers, these students brought critical incidents where they claimed its negative effects on their participation.

Linda narrated her experience with the oral production teacher who she described to be biased and prejudiced towards a group of students who come from the same city as him:

> We had this [she used a strong word which I decided to omit from the interview] teacher who used to talk only to certain girls in our class because they were from the same origins as him. Whenever I was trying to participate, he would not look at me and even gave us very low marks. He sometimes ignored us on purpose, so we shut up. He made me feel depressed, and I hated participating because of him. (Linda, Fieldnotes. Informal chat)

Linda asserted on occasions that she is a silent student because of her experience with this teacher, otherwise she would not describe herself as a naturally silent person. Her self-concept, self-confidence and perception of participation seemed deeply affected because of this teacher. Linda claimed that this teacher tended to favour those who come from the same origins as him, offered them opportunities for interaction and ignore others' attempt to participate. She also mentioned receiving low grades as a result of the deteriorating nature of the relationship she had with the teacher.

Wissam also shared a similar critical incident which dates back to secondary school. She talked about her teacher who used to intervene hostilely whenever she stammered over her words. According to her, this teacher's behaviour affected her immensely. Since then, she became afraid to participate, so she preferred being silent that being mocked. She narrated:

> In my first year, I had so many problems with participation, because I was not feeling comfortable with the language, I was always afraid of making mistakes. Well, let me tell you why. In high school, I had a teacher who was always mocking me, it was high school and we didn't have an advanced level in English, I was one of the student who always wanted to participate but I was doing a lot of (aaaa) like searching for appropriate words and thinking. This teacher was always stopping me and saying: if you don't know how to speak, then don't. I developed this complex which I brought it with me here to university. I was always afraid that teachers would do the same. (Wissam. Student Formal Interview)

Wissam stated how this incident affected her, she became less self-confident and cautious when speaking. This incident also resembles to that of Sanaa who claimed being traumatised by her primary school teacher.

These critical incidents show how important it is the behaviour of the teacher for students to construct their learning identity and foreign language self-concept. These students portrayed their silence as a form of protection. They withdraw oral engagement when their attempts to engage and interact were either neglected or reprimanded.

Further evidence resonated with the impact of teachers' behaviour on students' participation, named favouritism.

5.3.1. Teachers' favouritism

Other students who referred to teachers' negative behaviour used less sharp words than Linda. Lina for instance used 'favouritism' when she referred to her experience with a teacher. Lina's experience is similar to that of Linda as both described teachers who choose to interact with a limited number of students. However, Lina considered that teachers favour those who speak and those who they taught before. In such claim, Lina refers to the stereotype about silent students who are viewed as passive and to favouritism as a result of previous contacts or knowledge about students' academic achievements.

> Lina: I was participating in X class more than in Y class, why? Because I remember that the second was working with just some students, and he was even giving psychological rewards to them only, he used to ignore other students, including me.
>
> Me: How would you describe his behaviour in a word?
>
> Lina: I don't know, I don't think it's really racism but something somehow less than racism, favouritism, I would say.
>
> Me: Why do you think teacher do favouritism?
>
> Lina: because they don't know the others. It happened to me in Y classroom, he didn't use to know us me and my friend, so he was treating us like the others, (those who he doesn't know) and I think he has this mentality that if you don't participate then you are not a good student. He was only working with those who were his students before, as he considered them as the best.

In dissecting the data, some teachers literally claimed such kind of favouritism. Yahya for instance, mentioned names of his previous and current students who he thinks are the best, either because he had already taught them or because of their shining achievements known amongst teachers. Then he brought the example of teaching me and another friend and said:

> 'At the beginning I did not know you or your friend X, it was only after the first test that I became aware of your presence, then I went and asked about you. Also, when you brought those examples about borrowed words in the presentation, I knew then that you were both hard-working students.' (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

111

Such statement merely presents a teacher's mindset regarding students' perceived achievement. Although myself did not feel a sense of favouritism or neglect when I used to study under him; it still reflects part of the prejudice he holds that since I did not participate, I was not considered as competent as the others who he named, and the test grade was the first indicator which made me visible.

Zeyneb also referred to teachers' favouritism in classroom. She claimed that some teachers would work only with their contacts, or with those who appear competent in the first sessions.

> There are some teachers, on the first day, they take the list, they read the names, and choose only those famous names [*well-known names in the area*] and they start working with them [*referring to interaction*]. Others they choose only those who shine in the first sessions, because they start with revision of last year, and the problem is that we did not all study the same things, so those who studied them shine and the teachers think they are the best and build their future interactions based on that, and we are left neglected. (Zeyneb. Student Formal Interview)

In addition to what has been discussed, this excerpt actually presented feelings of power dynamics. Zeyneb claimed being neglected, thus choosing to remain silent when observing behaviours such as giving priority for students who excel and those holding well-known names.

To reach the end of this theme, a shared discourse amongst students was sharing experiences about teachers as pieces of advice to know what to expect. Zeyneb again explained:

> There are some teachers who give you the willingness to participate, but others are so severe, if you make a mistake they react in a harsh way that makes you never willing to raise your hand again. So, either it happened to me or I heard it from somebody else, I tend to be more silent with these teachers. (Zeyneb, Student Formal Interview)

Yahya confirmed: 'now there is a stereotype here, when someone says I am Yahya's student, others' first comment is "I swear you won't get the average". I think my status in this department is "don't play with wrong guy' (Yahya. Teacher formal interview)

With statements such as those above it seems possible to summarise then that silent students are affected by past and present experiences involving the neagtive behaviour of some teachers. Favouritism as such mentioned above can affect the dynamics of the classroom when students feel neglected. These behaviours also reflect teachers' authority and

dominance in classroom management as will be discussed in chapter six. Thus, students can choose to resort to silence and disengage orally under such circumstances and sometimes it is better described as students are being silenced instead of choosing silence. These align with many research studies which assert the importance of teacher-student rapport on student academic engagement. I mentioned in the literature 'flawed professionalism' (Bao, 2014, p. 50). He argued that teachers sometimes behave in a way that limit students' opportunities for learning. The findings of this section support his claims and add that teachers are sometimes the reasons for students to be silent. Also, Wang et al. (2022) mentioned that a student exhibited unintentional silence when she was neglected by her teacher because she did not participate as other students. On the opposite side, Xie and Derakhshan (2021) mentioned that positive interpersonal relationship like: confirmation, clarity and rapport that teachers use in the classroom can remarkably promote students' learning engagement. Budzinska and Majchrzak (2021) suggested that students' academic classroom engagement can be considerably enhanced in a positive learning atmosphere.

To this extent, the previous sections dealt with some external factors that students considered important when they tried to explain their classroom silence. In the following section, I present how students perceive their academic knowledge, language competence and how they perceive themselves in general.

5.4. Perceptions of self and academic ability

Generally, silent students are stereotyped for being less proficient users of a language. In terms of continuing to provide an outlook on these students' perceptions on their silence, I turn now to a more detailed perspective that is focused on the relation between students' silence and their perception of their self and academic ability. I mentioned previously that some students' perceptions and self-concept regarding their silence changed once they engaged in new learning environments and experienced internal and external transitions; the current cases related their silence to their perceived lack of ability or how others perceive them. This section hence considers the students' own views about their academic ability, and the reasons of their self-contained negative image then tackles meta-perceptions and its effects on students' oral participation.

5.4.1. A perceived lack of ability

At the outset of the research, when I first spoke to students, none of them seem to struggle with speaking in English. In fact, many of them would use English in our daily chats when the Algerian dialect would usually fulfil the need. However, since most of them identified themselves as silent students, they also seemed struggling to set frames of reference to explain their state.

Lina first claimed that lack of ability is her reason for silence. However, while engaged in the interview I noticed that she introspectively re-evaluated some of her statement and changed her learning positions depending on which situation she was talking about. She first talked about her feelings of lack of ability regarding the use of language in her first year at university:

> Now, I speak a lot, not because of maturity but because I found myself more capable of the language. Last year, I was shy, and I felt that if I spoke in front of the really fluent teacher, I would be embarrassed; of my accent, sometimes I stop to think of what to say.' (Lina. Students, Formal interview).

Lina in this extract associated silence with proficiency and referred to social comparison between her and the teacher. She referred to feelings of shyness and embarrassment regarding her own use of English because she would compare her accent and fluency to that of the teacher.

In this statement, she started with 'now, I speak a lot' which can at the first stance show that once the student develops her self-confidence regarding her language use, she will become less silent and more eager to speak. However once asked again about her silence of the first year, she connected her state with that of second year:

> Maybe embarrassment, at least in the first year, but now; I don't have this motive to say the answer. I don't know the reason [she realised that she contradicted her first answer and paused for seconds], hmm... sometimes I blame myself, when the teacher says what I was thinking about, I blame myself and start telling myself why I didn't say it. (Lina. Formal Interview)

Lina's clarification above seems agitated, she referred to embarrassment, lack of motivation, and self-criticism when unable to speak. It can be argued that Lina first assumption about language ability as her reason for silence is merely a result of her initial retrospection. However, it seems that her self-perception regarding her silence has actually changed once she attained a good level of English.

As her answer was indecisive, I asked her a year after in a follow-up interview, and explained her answer to her, she seemed surprised and commented:

> Before in my first year, I was struggling with the language, I used to structure the sentence in my head and think about it. But once we started doing oral presentations, students were asking me and my friend questions which necessitated a spontaneous and instantaneous answer. I believe this is how I got rid of my struggle. Now, it's not like I am no more motivated to participate [she seemed surprised that she said that]. I participate when I am sure about the answer; otherwise, I can't take the risk. (Lyna. Follow-up interview)

From this excerpt, she justified her claim that perceiving herself as silent goes with her perception of language ability. Yet her last statement shows the deep entrenched state of silence and fear of embarrassment when stated 'I can't take the risk'. This is further discussed in chapter seven about teachers and peer feedback.

Anne seems to hold the same position:

> Sometimes when we are in situations where we have to say something, but we choose not to say any word, for me, because I feel like the answer is foolish, it is not acceptable. (Anne, Formal Interview)

She described her answers to be 'foolish' on multiple occasions which indicates her discontent with the knowledge and competence she holds. Anne tended to heavily judge the quality of her answers or presentations and would literally exhibit her frustration about her performance in front of others by turning red or apologising repeatedly whenever she thinks has committed a mistake. She continued:

> I think there are a lot of opportunities to participate, because all the time I know the answers of the questions that teachers ask, sometimes I want to answer, but as I told you, it's foolish and silly, I need to make something more interesting, sometimes when I decide to say it, … [raised her hands upward and exhibited a feeling of satisfaction] (Anne, Formal Interview)

I believe that the self-image that these students hold about their language ability seems uninfluenced by their actual performance. The complexity of the emotions they feel during their silent moments in class affects deeply their self-concept of academic ability.

Several studies find that there is a positive relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement (Jaiswal and Chudhuri, 2017; Hoferichter, et al., 2018). This however is not present in these cases, as their academic achievement which is related to grades has a minimum impact on how they perceive themselves. It also means that their negative self-concept is influenced by their silence during classroom activities.

5.4.2. Meta-perceptions: 'They think I am Silent therefore I am'.

Meta-perceptions are the image we have about ourselves, which is dependent on what we believe others think about us.

Rima is a female student who was determinedly referred to as silent by her friend and teacher and seemed to agree that she is silent and shy. In all the interviews I had with students, Rima was the only student who had long pauses of silence, she took a considerable amount of time to answer each of my questions, and chose to speak in Arabic; I felt that she was meticulous about what she says.

In an informal discussion with a teacher, she mentioned Rima as an example of the extremely silent student who is shy and afraid of speaking. Later, Nour-student participant- referred Rima as she knew her from secondary school. In the classroom: 'Rima raised her hand to participate, she answered the teacher's questions, her teachers called her by first name, she asked for clarifications, so why do they think she is silent' (Field notes, 2019).

In a conversation with her teacher of Written Production, Amel was explaining to me how she handled the silence of one of her students, Rima was the example:

> She was silent and never participated. When I called her by name, she spoke with a very low voice that I had my head near her copybook to hear her. I saw that she did the activities and most of them were correct. I asked her once to raise her voice, and then her friend interfered to defend her saying: Miss, she is shy that's why she does not speak. I then took her apart and talked to her; she is doing better now.' (Amel 'teacher'. Informal Chat)

I did not get the impression that Rima is shy, it was the mere explanation for her silence though she kept repeating 'I am shy, it is my problem, I guess [slightly smiling].' (Rima. student, formal interview). I perceived her voice to be low, 'I could barely hear her talking, but she was talking' (Field notes, 2019). Her voice was not different outside the classroom; she spoke quietly and took time to answer questions. She answered my final question saying: 'I am silent, I don't like it to be silent, it is not a choice it's a problem which needs fixing.' (Rima, Student, formal interview).

Rima was not the most talkative student in class, but she participated in all the observation sessions I had even before meeting her. She accepted to be interviewed because her friend introduced her as a silent. I wrote as a side note that when having this interview:

> She seemed annoyed by the fact that people refer to her as silent. She told me that since she is not a talkative person in nature, her mother thought that she might have a psychological

problem. Then said that she is just quiet as compared to her siblings. (Field notes. January 2020)

I believe that including Rima's case is important for this study because it shows how meta-perceptions can affect a student own perception of their self and learning. The teacher and the student assumed that Rima is shy and unable to talk. Her friend interfered and showed her as 'shy and unable to speak' in mid of her answer. As previously stated, she participated, but because she was not heard by everyone, she was deemed to be silent. This raises questions on how people identify silence within a continuum of complete absence of speech to speaking with unheard voice. Also, this case I believe, questions the notion of shyness and identifying it with silent students.

It seems from the above comments that silent students own perceptions about their academic level and language competence can affect the way they participate and the way they construct their self-concept. This is partially in line with Zulkepli (2012) who found that students in her study have a poor self-image as second language learners and viewed themselves as weak performers of the language despite their good examination results. Her findings indicated that their judgement is based on their own assessment of their spoken and written skills.

For the current study, many of these students are intentionally silent in the classroom, however, when they talk about it, they do not always refer to themselves as silent. This was mainly because their self-confidence in their language competence developed. Moreover, peers and teachers' judgements and perceptions can affect how students in general perceive themselves. Rima shows how her self-concept is influenced by others' comments about her own participation and engagement behaviour. This can explain why teachers and observers sometimes struggle to understand the behaviour of silent students. Assuming that a silent student is shy by nature, introvert, and possibly absent minded is thoroughly discussed in the following section.

5.5. Teachers' views: 'Show me that you are not absent-minded by speaking'

Having looked at the insights obtained from participants' views and behaviour in which they contribute to the understanding of students' choices for silence, I move now to capture some of the teachers' perspectives in understanding their students' silence. An apparent principle I found common in teachers' data is the linear causality explanations for classroom silence which revolved around the student as an independent entity responsible on their silence. An

interesting reference that emerged from these early extracts of data revolved around the notion of achievement in assessment exams and its relationship with silent students.

Unlike students, most teachers sought mainly psychological explanations to interpret their students' silence. In the first contact with any of the teachers I had met during data collection, they provided me with brief explanations based on their experience regarding their silent students. The challenge to explain the classroom silence became apparent when they were confronted with the notion of silence tolerance in the classroom, despite verbally accepted, many teachers' behaviour seemed to contradict their stated opinion.

5.5.1. Personality: shyness, introversion, and attitudes

According to some teachers, shyness, introversion and attitudes towards the module, teachers and learning in general are the factors to consider when explaining why students are silent.

Wissal's comment on the research topic in our first meeting was:

> There are so many reasons to consider; introversion is one. I know that some students don't speak because they are introverts. I always realise it late, that I am making them uncomfortable when I force them, I feel so evil to make them feel that way. There is also boredom; they can be just uninterested and feeling bored. (Wissal, teacher, Informal Chat)

In the above statement, Wissal referred to introversion and other reasons for her students' silence and extrapolated the notion of tolerance through stating her regret of making students' uncomfortable through forcing them to speak. This gave the impression that she might be open to the idea of considering silence as a form of learning as she often uses 'can you please answer/tell/explain as if she is always offering them choice to answer her.' (Field Notes, Nov. 2019). She confirmed when I asked her again why she used the word 'evil': 'because they have the right to remain silent if they want to, I should not be forcing them.' (Wissal, teacher, informal chat).

She further explained:

> In the beginning, I used to think that if they are not responding that's either because they do not like the lecture, or they don't understand, but then through the time I learned that some students just don't want to speak or they don't feel comfortable in class. By discussing the matter with them, I discovered that some of them are somehow shy, some

of them would call themselves introverts, and some of them would say that they want to share their ideas but they can't speak in front of others because they feel shy. So, I kind of understand why there are always some silent students, and sometimes I do see their understanding and their level on the paper, so I know that it's not lost, they are retaining things. (Wissal, teacher, formal interview)

It could be argued then that this teacher demonstrated a degree of acceptance towards silent students' choice to remain silent in her classroom. She reached out to students and sought explanations. However, I do find it vexatious to solely explain such multifaced phenomena through a mere choice, introversion or shyness. This barricades our understanding to the multi-complex reasons for students' students and disguises other factors that are co-dependent on learning environments. Furthermore, the statement 'I do see their understanding on the paper… they are retaining things' may indicate a state of condition that it acceptable for students to remain silent if they do achieve well in written assessments. This is further discussed in chapter seven where I explain how assessment and grades are made connected to understanding students' silence.

Tantamount to Wissal's perspective, Rosa also regarded personality and attitudes as students' reasons for silence. However, she took a negative standpoint when explaining her views:

It has to do with their personality or their attitude. When they hate the teacher, they attend just because of absences, and they hate the module because of the teacher. Some of them are here just for the exams and absences. Some students, who sit in pairs, do not talk to each other. The excellent and brilliant students participate because it's part of their learning, sometimes when these students don't raise their hands, I feel like there is something wrong with them. (Rosa. Teacher, formal interview)

This statement resonates with the beliefs of many other teachers who would claim that students attend classes out of fear of absences and grades. Now, thinking about Rosa's explanation, she explicitly recognised those students who participate to be excellent, brilliant and demonstrate that they are engaged in learning. She connects the value of speaking to that of learning. She continued:

Look! I have examples of very excellent silent students because they are shy, sometimes because it's their personality, and I approached and asked them for their reasons. What I found is that the most majority of these terribly silent students get excellent marks in

written tests, so sometimes, I say I don't know who this person is, and this one got a good mark. Still, he's always absent here, and then this student says, Miss! But I'm always here. Then I say: No, because you don't show yourself, you are absent. You need to compensate what you have in written exams by speaking. If you do not talk, how will I know that you are here? I can notice you, but for me, you are just a body, absent-minded, your physics is here, but because you don't speak and interact, it means you are thinking about something else. Show me that your thinking is here. Show me that you are not absent-minded by speaking. (Rosa, Formal Interview)

This prejudice serves to show the entrenched beliefs that Rosa holds towards learning. Although she referred to silent students who are excellent, she recognized them as passive or 'absent-minded' since they do not speak. Such distinction is different from that of Wissal who believes that as long as silent students perform well in written exams then they are engaged in their learning, she answered the question whether she finds learning reflected in talk by: 'Not really because there are a lot of silent students who do learn a lot and maybe even more than the others, it's fair for them to be silent.' (Wissal. Teacher formal interview)

It is evident from teachers' interviews that there is a repeated pattern of confusion on how to understand the behaviour of silent students. Although all teachers considered the silent students as a category or group who struggle with psychological inhibitors, they seemed to be disputed when referring to silent students who achieve good grades. As the data seem to indicate, I believe that teachers' dependence on the linear causality adds insight as confusion into the puzzling nature of students' silence.

Amel expressed such confusion when she opposed engagement to silence:

The silent student is not the one who does not talk, maybe their grades are good, so they are not silent, they are engaged, and they put their capabilities and knowledge on the paper. Sometimes, I give them homework which I take later to correct it, and I find that the answers of those silent students are correct, so they are not silent, they are learning. (Amal, Teacher Formal Interview)

Amal associated the word "silence" with a complete disengagement from classroom written and spoken activities. She considered silent students who do their homework and perform well in written tasks to be engaged as opposed to silent. It might be claimed that since Amel taught writing, her focus is generally on students' performance in written tasks rather than oral tasks.

Therefore, these data indicate that teachers categorized silent students: shy, introverts, absent-minded or lack focus and attention. Their perceptions of silent students were merely a description of the behaviour of students and which ignored the contextual factors and environments of learning. The constant reference to silent students' achievement in written tasks and exams can indicate an issue that teachers are facing when dealing with their silent student, as grades are considered the assessment outcome of learning. Such issue is further explained in chapter seven.

5.5.2. 'Of course, it does bother me to have silent students in my classroom'

Zina also agreed that students who are silent lack focus and attention, she illustrated her argument:

> I should bring my son to you; he is driving me crazy. All teachers are complaining about him. He does not participate, unlike his twin sister. So, I think lack of focus and attention is what makes them silent because they are not aware of what's going on around them. (Zina, Teacher Informal Chat).

This sense being annoyed by silence was shared by other teachers explicitly: 'of course it bothers me to have silent students in my class, I hate it, I try to do whatever I can to make them speak' (Rosa. Teacher Formal Interview), and Yahya in a similar statement said:

> Of course, it does bother me to have silent students in my classroom. This morning, for instance, I told them, it's one of the two, either I don't explain well or there is a problem with you learning the module. I gave them the rule, I asked them to apply it and give me one example,1+1 it's 2, yet they failed and were all silent. (Yahya, Teacher Formal Interview)

From the above set of data, teachers appeared to force their students to speak. Yahya referred to one of the held assumptions that students resort to silence when they do not understand the topic. These claims have some commonality with what is mentioned previously, teachers seem to hold students' accountable on their silence with little or no reference at all to contextual and situational factors. Further explanations by Rosa and Yahya reveal such confusion with the understanding that teachers have about silent students. Rosa already explained that it might be their personality, or they are 'absent-minded', then when she was asked why would she force them if she already knew that it is their personality, she said:

Look! When you know your students, you will automatically know if learning is taking place or not, if they are following you or not, if they are absent minded or not. It's from the way they interact with you, it's participation among many other things, participation is one feature. It means if your students are silent, it means either they do not understand you or they are terribly out, mentally out, occupying their minds by thinking about something else, especially during period of exams and tests, for example now we are not in that period yet, so it's clear if students are engaged or not. (Rosa. Formal Teacher Interview)

In the above quote, Rosa mentioned that silent students can be orally disengaged for many reasons. Her reasons again appear to be related to lack of understanding, stress of exams, or they are 'mentally out' or 'absent minded' as she stated before. She refused to state that silent students could be engaged silently, because for her oral participation seem to be the indicator of engagement.

Yahya, on the other hand, contradicted his first explanation that they struggle to understand the subject that is why students are silent, to introduce a hypothesis that students who are silent are a category of students who are smart and intelligent, and he again linked that assumption with grades:

I build on my own experience, I was not so talkative as a student, I used to be more like silent, and I was learning. I can't say or claim that if you don't talk, then you are not learning because this depends on the personality of the student. We have the introvert learner and the extrovert learner. There is another type of learners, I am not categorizing, but there is a type who speaks only for the extreme need, let's say I ask whether they understand this point and if they can give me an example, so this type of student is smart enough. They understand the information, but they say in their head: well, I understood it so why to bother to say yes or no. They have plenty of examples in their mind, but they don't mention them, but it comes to a time when something is intriguing for them, there you can see them intervene. Generally speaking, this type of student gets the rewards [extra marks], because their intervention is always interesting and straight to the point, and I personally reward them when they do it. (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

The fact that Yahya used the same argument to explain his second hypothesis, that students who are silent do not understand the subject and then linking that argument to the silent students who are smart and do not bother to answer ordinary questions. It could perhaps be argued that teachers' prejudice towards speaking in the classroom is entrenched in their

mindset and hard to be overlooked. The sense of confusion which was present in teachers' data can be regarded as a resistance towards forsaking the provision of speaking and its assumed relation to learning, therefore, most of their arguments appeared to be shallow with regard to the complexity of silence per se. Again, and constant with the notion of learning and silence, although some teachers reflected a tolerant mindset towards students' choice to remain silent and argued that it does not necessarily mean disengagement from learning, they constantly referred to grades and performance in written tasks. This I believe raise more concerns on the challenges found in the assessment of students for learning.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have covered the different assumptions which students and teachers have about silence in the language classroom. There appears to be a discrepancy between the beliefs and understanding that students have with regard to their silence and the way teachers explained and theorised on the nature of their students' silence. These differences in perceptions are important because they can reflect two main issues in the setting: the first is that there is little or no communication between students and teachers about the needs and interests of students regarding lessons planning, classroom participation preferences, and classroom management. The second is that teachers appear to be not equipped with necessary pedagogical knowledge to deal with classroom silence. In some cases, students claimed that teachers exhibit non-professional behaviour which forced them to be silent. Listening to students talk about some experiences either about how they perceive the content of lessons or the way some teachers behave shows the importance of including their voice to promote positive learning atmosphere. The silence of the students in this chapter reflects the forms of silence mentioned in the literature review, see section 2.3. Some students were intentionally silent, others expressed unintentional silence, some students like Sanaa reflected silence as a response to trauma. Almost of forms of silence exist withing the classrooms I observed and were expressed by students' different experiences.

This chapter also shows that teachers were sometimes intolerant towards classroom silence. They relied on psychological inhibitors such as introversion and shyness and also seem to hold students' accountable for their lack of oral participation. Silence is associated with lack of attention, lack of understanding and lack of competence.

Students however revealed that their states of silence are dynamic and have been forged through critical incidents which some dated back to primary school. Their experiences in

formal and informal learning environments, interactions with teachers, and their sense of their academic ability, their meta-perceptions and understanding the relevance of the lessons content to their interests and learning were all reasons which they considered important while referring to their silence.

Importantly, the self-concept of silent students appears to be dynamic and continuously changing while engaged in different experiences. Students represented themselves as silent whenever not interested in the content, having negative relationships with teachers and when not trusting their own language competence. They rejected the notion of negative silence and repositioned themselves as not silent or not having the negative connotations of silence when they were feeling secured and capable of participating. All these positions included both forms of intentional and unintentional silences. Also, the way silent students shifted in their positions between being silent and not silent shows that these silent students can exhibit many other learning positions away from the binary of silent and not silent.

Moreover, there appears to be a constant reference to silent students who achieve good grades. Such constant references to grades prove to be an important key factor for teachers and students alike to determine the engagement and learning of students in the classroom. Chapter seven extensively discusses grades and assessments in the setting.

The next chapter will further explore the teaching and learning practices in the classroom and will try to establish a ground for understanding classroom participation, students' engagement and the dynamics of the English language classroom in the setting where the study is based.

Chapter Six

Teaching and Learning in the Classroom

Classroom Participation, Forms of Engagement, and disengagement

6. Introduction

In this chapter about classroom participation and engagement, it is relevant to explain the background of the teachers and students' beliefs, classroom norms and expectations regarding the appropriate classroom practices.

Section 6.2 entitled teachers in charge of participation explains the different participation preferences in the language classroom. Most of them are structured and teacher instructed. This section also reveals the impact of students' prior learning experiences on shaping their current classroom participation preferences.

The next section 6.3. entitled group work and collaborative practice deals with how students engage in group work activities. This part of analysis attempt to reveal reasons which determine the silent participants' readiness to take part in collaborative practices and group work activities.

The last section 6.4. labelled modules and oral engagement covers teachers' beliefs regarding associating language learning with communicative classrooms. This section sheds light on teachers' practices in teaching a variety of modules. Some of these modules require students' oral participation and communication whereas other do not.

6.1. Teacher's authority in constructing classroom participation

In this chapter about classroom participation, it is important to explain the participants' views about structuring classroom talk and also clarify why teachers are expected to be the authority responsible on classroom decisions, hence participation and allocating roles. Even though the assumption may point to better opportunities for speaking when the teachers take a backside role, as already mentioned in the informal learning environment, apparently a more structured and teacher-instructed practice is favoured by both students and teachers. Importantly, the challenging task is to understand the underpinning beliefs regarding the claims for a teacher-centred approach and how the mechanisms that claim more opportunities for students to speak in oral modules are also operated by a teacher-centred convention. Silence is therefore imposed implicitly by the classroom regime and is believed to be a norm rather than simply a student's trait.

This section outlines first the role of the teacher in guiding participation in 6.2.1, then it highlights the importance of asking for permission in order to participate in 6.2.2. then it tackles some forms of structuring classroom participation in 6.2.3.

6.1.1. 'The teacher is the leader and the controller of the classroom'

In the first place, the teachers and students seemed more oriented to the notion of teacher-centred classroom. All teachers referred to incidents where silence is considered a norm and a desired behaviour which maintain the classroom order in place. They also perceived the notion of maintaining silence as incumbent upon themselves to support the learning environment and ensure classroom management. Yahya explained:

> When I teach oral production, my role is more on organising turns, for example, to ensure silence! order, don't disturb! [*Referring to what he says in class*]. I also wait for questions; some of them ask what about you, sir? Because many of them bring those topics of women work, women rights… Here I give my intervention when I am asked to. (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

Oral production sessions are structured to optimise students' discussions and develop their speaking skills. He meant by maintaining order and silence that students listen to each other and ensue fair turn-allocation. Basically, in this statement, he considered silence as a

facilitative technique to ensure classroom management and optimizing learning through listening to others' contributions. I also believe that his position as the one who manages and organizes the classroom and rarely interferes is to support the module goals and also part of his belief that authority should be in place as will be seen in the following sections. On another occasion about his teaching approach, he said: 'if you ask me about my orientation, I opt for a teacher-centered approach.' (Yahya. Teacher Informal Chat).

In written production, Amel referred to a role different than that of Yahya in the oral production sessions, she mentioned: 'in most sessions, I am the one who delivers content. Even when they work in groups, they are supposed to show me what they have prepared. So, that's why I feel like I am the only one responsible in the classroom' (Amel. Teacher. Informal Chat). I observed that she stands in the front of the classroom and follows an extremely structured model for participation as will be discussed in (6.2.3.).

Students also referred to notions associated with teacher-centeredness and believed that teachers are responsible on structuring participation. Anne said: 'the teacher is the leader and the controller of the classroom, so they should know these things [*referring to turns allocation*]' (Anne. Formal Student Interview).

I use the following examples to illustrate the notion of teacher-centredness and the deep entrenched beliefs that support only one authority figure responsible on classroom management and turns allocations. These incidents portray how silence is imposed and used to ensure notions of authority and control over the learning environment.

A noisy classroom

> (. . .) Students forgot that I was there and started discussing the things and the matters between them; they were still speaking about the topic but [*surprised face*] they simply ignored me there in class. They were debating about the topic, that's' nice but it made a lot of noise. I couldn't stop them from speaking, I couldn't get their attention again, so if it gets a little too noisy and if the students are more interested in each other and forget the teacher's presence and start debating things between themselves, if it gets too noisy, it's bothering. (Wissal. Formal teacher interview)

In this particular incident, Wissal expressed her discomfort with having students challenging her status as the one who should lead discussions. Having students debating over the course content reflects their interest in the topic and a dynamic learning environment. However, when she sensed that she is no longer in control, she had to impose silence to restore her

dominant status in class as the one who should distribute turns for students to talk. She also referred to noise in the classroom when students engage with each other, which seems undesired in classrooms which are teacher-led.

I also recorded another incident where Yahya instructed his student who was expected to give a presentation about his expected role as the presenter and also as a figurative teacher:

> Today is your presentation, you play the role of the teacher, I am not the one who keeps order. If I see noise and that you can't control the whole classroom, then this will influence your mark. This means that I am a teacher only with you [*the student who is presenting*] but your role is to maintain silence and order [*control the classroom*]. If you fail, I punish you. (Classroom Observation)

These incidents did not directly refer to silent students, they demonstrated a belief that classroom silence can be imposed to ensure management and is believed to have a facilitative role to ensure teachers' authority. My impression from these pieces of data is that these participants hold the belief that students' participation is led, guided, and monitored by teachers who embody the authority in charge of the classroom. A brief incident I encountered with a student from India who recently started her degree in a UK university; she expressed her frustration when the teacher rarely interfered to assign roles or check on their work:

> When we finished our group work (performed remotely), I raised my hand and asked the teacher to come check it, she said it's fine (the teacher thought that there is no need to check on the work). So, I could not just move on I needed her to come and check the work. Other students did not do that, but where I come from, I think this is how we are supposed to learn, by teacher's guidance and feedback. (Fieldnotes, researcher diary)

This incident explains how individuals' entrenched beliefs on learning, participation, and other forms of classroom practice are brought to the classroom and expected to be applied and followed.

The issue which seems to be apparent in these chunks of data is that labels of teacher-centeredness, teachers in charge, teachers as leaders all seem to refer to teachers' responsibility to allocate turns for speaking and participation.

6.1.2. Asking for permission to speak

When teachers were asked about the forms of participation, they disliked the most in classroom; Yahya, Israa, Rosa and Amel answered: 'speaking without raising their hand'

(Formal Teacher Interviews). This statement had already surfaced in the initial findings when I observed that a majority of students speak only after raising their hands or by following a pattern for participation and seemed agitated when others speak without asking for permission. This became more apparent in the analysis of later data of interviews and students' diaries. In most of these classrooms, teachers monitored turn-allocations, silence seemed to be a norm, and silent students with whom I had the interviews hardly ever raised their hands, however, they participated in other forms of structured participation.

I use the following sets of data to illustrate this form of participations in more details.

Hand raising

> In school and even at university, I feel like I don't have the right to speak unless the teacher asks me so. Some students talk randomly without even the teachers' permission, but me myself, I have realised that I can't speak unless I am chosen by the teacher, unless I raise my hand and get selected. Even though I know the answer, but I can't just say it like that randomly, and I think this is because of the impact of the school because we got used to this form of behaviour. (Lina. Formal Interview)

This statement by Lina reveals how she perceived the structure of classroom participation. She considered oral participation to be constrained by the classroom rules which dictate how students are expected to participate. Yet, the rules are mainly those which she was used to them in her pre-territory education. Her reference to constraining herself seems to denote a fear to act in undesired manner. She explained this argument:

> Because I learnt that I shouldn't speak without raising my hand. My teacher used to punish me, and she even called my father and told him that I am a hard-working student, but I should respect the classroom rules. I think at that time. I learnt how to constraint my impulse to speak, be disciplined and wait for the teacher to select me. (Lina. Follow-up Interview)

I explained in chapter five that students are affected by prior learning experiences which may influence their construction and perception of their current self-concept. Lina linked her current perception of hand raising to the previous learning experience she encountered in primary school. Although seeming

A similar view expressed by Nour who also considered hand raising a form of managing turns and establishing rapport between teachers and students. However, her statement referred to praise she felt whenever chosen to speak, she said:

In grammar, the teacher used to ask us to raise our hands to answer but now she asks us to answer one by one in rows. I personally feel like the teacher cares about me when she selects me. (Nour. Student Formal Interview)

Raising hands and getting chosen to speak seem fair for students who feel at ease with teachers who are in control of participation. Nevertheless, silent students sometimes tend to avoid participation and hand raising.

Other silent students did not enclose the same preference towards hand raising. In fact, they referred to the perceived notion of teachers' favouritism and unequal opportunities for students when the process of selecting students is based on raising hands.

Anne was sitting in the library working on a grammar task, I asked her if she would share her answers later in the session, she commented: 'in grammar class, I used to raise my hand all session, but she avoided me and chose those who had already spoken, it is just unfair to be selective with your students' (Anne. Informal Student Chat).

Rima also argued: 'teachers must pick those who do not participate, because giving the chance only to those who raise their hands is unfair, they should learn how to read faces and pick students who can't raise their hands.' (Rima. Student Formal Interview).

Here was a major difference in how students perceived hand raising. Yet, they all referred to teachers' responsibility in selecting students who speak. Rima explained that 'there are some students when the teacher asks something they answer, they analyse, and they discuss; when we are still thinking about what the teacher has asked'. (Rima. Student Formal Interview).

Such behaviour refers to students' dominance, a relatively short waiting time, and self-selection to answer questions.

The intention behind including "hand raising" under teachers' responsibility comes as a result of a number of factors. First, the norms and beliefs that some students bring with them to university classes from their prior education regarding appropriate participation are found to be in favour with raising hands instead of speaking arbitrarily. Secondly, it is also the responsibility of the teacher to select students fairly as giving more opportunities to certain students repeatedly create power imbalance in the classroom, some students also mentioned the thrill which they feel after being selected by the teacher to answer a question; this serves the psychological needs of students. Thirdly, some students consider teachers the authority figure in this form of participation because it allows them to see those who can and cannot

speak and raise their hands; then this should allow teachers to think about including students who tend to avoid participation.

6.1.3. Structured Participation: Turns and the list of names

Participants also extended the notion of structuring classroom participation by referring to speaking one-by-one by following the sitting arrangement or the list of students' names. In doing this teachers' intention is to orally engage all students fairly. Some students perceived it helpful to speak when already notified when their turn is coming, while others were observed to be attentive to turns allocations, showed some anxiety when not being prepared for to answer, and did not pay attention to their peers' responses.

Nour told me that she feels comfortable when she knows when she is expected to talk. Compared to hand raising, structuring participation through following the sitting arrangement do not require her to volunteer or raise her hand, therefore despite being under the spot when her turn comes, she appreciated that opportunity to share her answer:

> In the last session, I had my summary ready and I know it was good, but I could not raise my hand to participate. Because, if someone else said something and the teacher liked it, I would be afraid that my idea won't be praised too. That's why when we speak one by one, I feel like I am not given any other choice but to speak when my turn comes. (Nour, Student Formal Interview)

This sentiment did not seem to be the case of other students in her class as the next extract of data shows discomfort demonstrated in the behaviour of Nour's classmates who felt pressured to give answers for specific questions because it was their turn in this form of structured participation, I attended this session with the teacher Zina:

> They are supposed to answer questions one by one, following the sitting arrangement. Two students seem to be counting the questions numbers and students' number so they can identify which questions they are supposed to answer. Two other students seemed to be in a rush and debating who shall answer first. Their turns were close, and they were asking other students to confirm whether they have the correct answers. I can see that if they were given a choice, they would probably answer something else. (Classroom Observation. November 2019)

A very similar incident which I encountered during a classroom observation is with a teacher called Amel. 'Her students know exactly when they are supposed to talk, because she uses the students' name list to make them all answer her questions one by one. Each time a student answers

something, they appear relieved and stop being attentive to what other students are saying'
(Classroom Observation. Writing Expression).

When I wondered why she follows this technique instead of waiting for students to raise their hands; she said:

> Sometimes they are tired, I don't know! maybe they are lazy to raise their hands. In all cases, I feel obliged to use the name list. Another thing is that working with the name list is like stimulating them to prepare for answers, because having one or two students answering is not enough. How can they know their level if they don't participate and answer questions? (Amel. Teacher Formal Interview)

In terms of describing these preferred ways of participation, these participants are also referring to an inclination towards teachers taking control in turns distribution and organising classroom participation. It seems then, that in the case of silent students, some are mostly silent in voluntary participation which requires hand raising, and they are to an extent, following the classroom norms imposed by teachers like speaking one-by-one or through the list of names.

The belief standing behind structuring participation tend to be having an organised classroom and equal opportunities for students' participation. Amel stated:

> I hate participation without permission, without asking me for permission, when they speak all at once, I hate this behaviour, and I always ask them to raise their hands in order to give the chance to the one I choose to answer and they will have the same chance. This has a reason of course, in class there are some students who do not participate, suggesting that they learn by sitting silently, how can they learn if all the classroom is talking at once, that's why it's better to have one student talking at once to let the others listen to him and learn from each other. (Amel. Formal Teacher Interview)

Importantly, these pieces of data were collected from teachers who admitted a preference towards teacher-centredness. However, another teacher who was observed less controlling and mostly letting her students take the initiative to participate stated:

> I don't like pointing to a particular student to answer me, it causes embarrassment, and my students don't like it, they will be afraid every time I ask a question. Eventually, they will stop coming to my lectures, so I would rather have a silent class than an empty one.' (Israa. Formal teacher interview).

Across these findings, I think that students' participation is organised through patterns and rules. Most students fulfill their roles and speak when they are asked to answer questions. Classrooms under such principles may have the minimum of student-initiated discussions. Therefore, if we are to link the findings of this section with students' participation within different classroom cultures, we find that informal classes are designed to support students'-initiated discussions. The conventional classrooms with the practices of conventional pedagogy support minimum interactions or silence whenever needed to impose the authority of the teacher.

I infer that authentic classroom participation seems to be habituated by teachers' beliefs, in the first place, on what are considered as appropriate forms of participation. Wissal is one example of teachers who feel threatened by unmonitored interactions in her classroom, she stopped her students' discussion to reestablish her authority. Students also seem to be lenient to this form of authority as it is part of the classroom practices and beliefs which they are acquainted with from their prior learning experiences.

Organising participation in the classroom and distributing turns for students to talk are believed to be the responsibility of teachers.

6.2. Engagement in group work activities

Group work, another form of classroom participation that silent students are expected to be engaged in as part of their learning. Having seen how participants demonstrated preferences towards certain norms of classroom participation, it seems appropriate to also provide data on students' engagement in group work activities. This way, it might be seen whether teachers' authority over participation and assigning turns for speaking is also present in collaborative activities and whether it is a norm in all classroom activities or there are discrepancies when it comes to students working together.

In the first place, participants indicated implicitly two forms of group work: informal and formal. Informal group work activities seem to have interpersonal goals, focus on the process of learning in a relatively less confined setting, and silent students claimed a positive attitude towards this type of engagement. On the other hand, formal group works tend to serve pedagogical goals that are related to assessing students' performance with regard to given

tasks; this form of engagement could be subject to a potential resistance and disengagement from students due to a number of factors that are discussed under 6.3.2.

The following sections highlight and discuss silent students' engagement in these two forms of group work.

6.2.1. Informal Group work

Informal group work is often found in settings that are not strictly supervised by teachers. Students organise groups to reach personal learning goals like revision, working on tasks and socialising. Interpersonal motives like friendship are found to be the driving source for this type of group work engagement. Such form of engagement is observed to be free of authoritative dominance and power relations. This sub-section reflects positive attitudes toward engaging in group work activities where students participants claimed its effectiveness.

Sanaa said: 'I love working in groups, I think working in a team is a better way of expressing my capabilities and doing stuff. I can take from others and give back at the same time, it's about using all our powers to make something beautiful, the outcome is always better.' (Sanaa. Student formal Interview). Wissam also agreed that working in groups for revisions had a positive impact on her performance inside the classroom, she explained: 'I do enjoy working in groups, and I think it's the best way to study or to work on something, lately we started working in groups for revision and we found that it's really beneficial, our grades got so much better.' (Wissam. Student Formal Interview).

These particular students associated the benefits of group work with the collaborative process of working together. The achieving goal for such group engagement is to support personal learning- as Wissam referred to grades as the positive result of the collaboration, and Sanaa mentioned that the outcome is always better.

In addition, friendship seems to influence informal group work formation. Nour said:

> I like working in groups with my close friends, because it gives me the chance to talk about my views and opinions better from when I am alone. I feel like my mind works double. I sometimes suggest to them to revise together, because when I explain to them, I understand and recall the information better. (Nour. Formal Student Interview)

Like the previous cases, Nour's motive for engaging in group work is to support her personal learning. She considered the familiarity between the group members 'friends' to be a leading factor in her willingness to engage.

Sanaa explained that she chooses who she works with in group work, because incompatibility between group members affect engagement and the primary goal of group work that is working together, she said:

> I don't work with people who try to impose their ideas on me, or try to be dominant leaders, I choose who I work with, because what's the point of working in a team if we don't share our ideas. The point of a team is sharing ideas and selecting them to make something out of it. (Sanaa. Formal Student Interview)

In the same line of thoughts, informal group work can also be initiated by teachers. Wissal referred to how group work inside the classroom can help students engage with each other by sharing and discussing ideas. She claimed its importance for silent students to help them talk without the pressure or fear of the teacher's presence. She stated:

> Since I work with literary texts, I tend to let them think about the literary text, feel like they are inside the text, ask them about their feelings, ask them if they are the protagonist and such thing happens to them. Sometimes, I use some games in class like brainstorming, to make them work together and allow the students who usually don't speak to learn from the others and share their ideas as well, and this is to make them feel more relaxed, if they can't speak to the teacher. (Wissal. Teacher Formal Interview)

Wissal's reasons for asking her students to engage in group work are to develop their habits of collaboration and help them engage with each other without the fear of assessment. Informal group work can be part of classroom activities when the teacher lets students work on their own without his/her supervision and when the focus of the work is on the process of learning from each other rather than a product to deliver for assessment.

6.2.2. Formal Group work

Formal group work is usually initiated by the teacher to achieve pedagogical purposes. It is often assessed and monitored by the teacher where students are expected to perform their roles in the process. Several issues were observed to have an impact on students' willingness to engage in formal group work activities, mainly teachers' intrusion, dependency and competitive attitudes.

6.2.2.1. 'I decide who is in the groups'

Friendship and interpersonal motives seem to influence informal group work formation. In formal group work, teachers seem to interfere in the group formation, structure tasks,

allocate roles, and choose the setting. I illustrate this by Yahya's statement about the process he thinks is important in making students work together:

> I mix students with different abilities and different backgrounds and make them prepare for oral presentations (…) and I decide who is in the groups, for instance I include a boy with two girls, or two who always sit together I separate them on purpose, the belief I have in mind is that I am breaking this small routine circle, or dynamics. (Fieldnotes. Yahya. Informal Chat).

According to what Yahya said, forming groups in the classroom is a planned process where teachers consider a number of criteria, like competence and background, to engage students together. I observed Yahya on a number of occasions, and he did not seem to ask his students to work on tasks in groups inside the classroom. His notion of group work appeared to be tightly related to preparing for oral presentations that are assessed at the end. He also referred to how students perceived this method of forming group works:

> (…) but for students they understand it as an action against their comfort. I am not trying to impose my authority, but I am making them connect and build relationships with each other outside the classroom. Now, this is one of the ways to break students' silence, I engage them in collaborative activities. (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

These comments resonate with what many other teachers do in terms of assigning roles for students based on the area they excel in. They also resonate with data obtained from students who referred to issues raising between group members when groups are formed by teachers which will be explained in detail in the following points: competitive attitudes and dependency.

In a discussion with a PhD student about managing group work activities in the classroom, she explained to me one of the teacher's methods that she observed in allocating roles. She stated:

> A teacher sets a placement test on the first day she meets with her students, she observes those who participate and those who seem shy, takes notes on their fluency and then she forms small groups of 4 students. She then assigns tasks to each one of them. For instance: the one who is fluent usually presents, the one who shows good critical skills brings topics, someone with good handwriting prepares and writes posters… etc'. (Field notes. Informal Discussion with a PhD Student).

According to these views, group work is considered as a pedagogical practice that has specified goals like engaging students together, supporting and nourishing personal skills, and balancing group levels, encouraging students to work outside their comfort zones, and even breaking students' silence through engaging them in collaborative works. However, as Yahya stated, students do not seem aware of this pedagogic process, and may consider it uncomfortable as the interpersonal aspect seems to be the driving source for students' willingness to engage in group work. Having this said, students although showing negative feelings towards teacher-assigned group work, they engaged and performed their tasks collaboratively. This supports the findings of Hilton and Philips (2008) and Hassaskhah and Mozaffari (2015) who indicate that participants' initial negative perception towards tasks and groups that are teachers-imposed did not affect the quality work, and students claimed satisfactory cooperation feelings.

In the same line of thought, teachers' instructed group work can be also with regard to the setting. Compared to informal group work which can happen at any place, and teachers who believed that group work goes through a process of selection, Israa claimed that group work are better performed inside the classroom, her reasons were:

> Students always come with excuses for not doing their homework, so they will find an excuse for not working in groups together outside classroom too. They will say: we live far from each other, girls will say that they are not allowed to go to their classmates' houses, boys will say that they work when they are not in university. Therefore, I always give them activities in class and ask them to work in groups in class (Israa. Teacher informal Chat)

Israa believed that inside classroom activities are more efficient as students cannot refuse to perform them. Unlike other teachers, she did not assign roles to students or oblige certain individuals to work together. However, after observing several sessions, I noticed that students were merely memorizing chunks of dialogues and then performing them tediously, little or no signs of negotiation or oral exchanges were happening during the process:

> All her oral sessions seemed to have a dialogue practice activity. Each two or more students take the script, memorize it and then perform it group by group. No negotiation seemed to take place, except for some students who wanted to take the longer parts in the scripts. The process was always awkwardly silent than what I expected a group work activity to be. When performing the dialogue, I noticed that many students were trying to use a 'native-like' accent and a more audible voice than others. Eventually, the next

performing group followed the same pace of performance, using even a higher voice or tone and a more noticeable accent. (Field notes).

In these sessions, engagement in group work was extremely monitored by the teacher, little or no interaction of knowledge was happening, and the process entitled silently memorising then practicing out loud. It became clear to me that students who tried to memorise the longer chunks, used a higher voice tone, and a noticeable accent were adding their print to the activity. This can be regarded as students' personal contribution to the monitored process of the group work.

In summation, formal group practices are subject to teacher's interference in the formation of the groups, assigning roles and tasks, and setting anticipated pedagogical outcomes. Although not clearly apparent in the above statements, but students seem to be unaware of teachers' motives in structuring group works. Although Hassaskhah and Mozaffari (2015) reported that groups selected by teachers were more successful at accomplishing the task compared with those who selected themselves, which may resonate with the teachers' prospective regarding imposing roles or selecting group members.

Data however revealed that students' emotional aspect interfered in their perception of engaging in group works that are instructed by the teachers. Students of self-selected grouping reported that pre-existing friendship was the major criterion upon which they relied to choose the members. Moreover, they found friendship and self-selection as significant factors which help to facilitate of communication, cooperation and trust among members. Altogether these factors resulted in what they viewed the quality of the collaborative process. The findings are in line with (Hilton & Philips, 2008; Basta, 2011) which revealed that whenever students are allowed to select the members of the group, they choose their friends and this leads to comfortable communication (Russell, 2010), high satisfaction (Matta et al., 2010) and high cooperation (Mushtaq et al., 2012) among group members.

To this end, facilitating the communication between teachers and students in explaining the task structure and why students are chosen to work in specific groups with specific members can better help students understand the goals of the collaborative activity. Whenever possible students should be allowed to self-select the members as this can raise their willingness to engage in classroom group works and give them a sense of agency.

I continue the discussion about the challenges which students face in the teacher-instructed group works in the following section.

6.2.2.2. Competitive Attitudes and Leadership

Moreover, even though students claimed their engagement with competitive behaviour to perform better in tasks and gain better grades, they also referred to negative competition where members of the group tried to dominate or take the lead in the group work. Taking into consideration the previous sections where some teachers claimed their control over forming groups, assigning roles, and dictating tasks and other students supporting the notion of choosing who to work with, the following findings support this crack of communication between teachers and students and provide details of why students tend to resist working in groups when power dynamics affects the group members. Interestingly, most silent

students referred to pair work as a desired way to create positive competition and avoid power dynamics.

I use the following examples to explain how competitive attitudes in group or pair work affect students' engagement. Anne explained:

> I do really love to work and present things with a pair, because when we are working in pairs, and we go to present something, I feel like we are in a competitive situation, so that I do my best to be shining, when we are just two we can understand and accept each other, when we are more than two I kind of lose the joy of it, I'll just follow whatever they do. (Anne. Formal Student Interview)

Similarly, Wissam claimed:

> In classroom, I prefer to work with just one student, because last year a teacher made us work in groups and it wasn't a really nice experience, everyone was like fighting, there was a lot of noise. We could not just decide on one thing, everyone was trying to impose their ideas, but at the same time we couldn't arrive at one. I interfered and said let's choose this and move on to another thing, I mean there should be someone guiding. (Wissam. Formal Student Interview)

In these particular instances it showed that both students found pair work more beneficial than group work. Mostly the reasons they claimed are a sense on non-homogeneity in the group.

Competitive behaviour emerges when someone tries to dominate the group and take the lead without prior negotiation with other group members. Nour mentioned that 'in groups, sometime some girls tend to object on anything we say, they don't let us finish as if they know everything, they impose their ideas on the group as if they are leading us.' (Nour. Formal Student Interview).

Anne also mentioned:

> When we are working in a group, and when we are not going to present, I like it. But sometimes there are members who do not like to accept our ideas, they think that only their ideas are right and mine are wrong and full of grammar mistakes, and I know it's not, I dislike this. (Anne. Formal Student Interview)

These data present the perspective of silent students regarding competitiveness between students. An important note from Anne is 'when we are not going to present'; this chunk of data describes the importance students give to the product of the group work. Generally, presentations are assessed, and students receive grades based on their individual performance or the performance of the whole group, therefore, students can feel intimidated to work in groups for assessed tasks. As the issue of unequal status and power dominance seems dominant in students' claims, students with competitive attitudes tend to overly step on other students' contributions by diminishing their ideas, imposing certain outlooks, raising conflicts on who should lead or present. It seems that even in these small groups, there is this tendency of unilateral power that a one individual should take the lead.

Israa mentioned:

> Some students want to possess power, especially in group work, I do have students all the time coming to me asking to change their group because one of them treats them inferiorly and that one behaves like she/he knows everything and the others know nothing. They don't have this habit of collaboration, sharing ideas all together, and deciding which is best. (Israa. Formal Teacher Interview)

Other students took a more extreme stance and complained about group work activities. Ghada and Lina spoke about losing time and energy on sharing knowledge with others. Lina referred to the belief that working in groups can make other students achieve better grades than her.   So, group work seemed to affect their academic performance: Ghada said:

> We usually do group work in Oral, in other modules it's just in the exposés [presentations]. I don' t like group work, because I feel that it's a waste of time. My attention goes lost with this and that, they ask we answer, but when I am alone if I get stuck, I use google and it's done. (Ghada. Student Informal Chat)

In the same vein, Lina explained:

> In the exams students used to revise in groups, and they were asking me to revise with them, but I refused, because I felt like I was giving them all what I know, all the

information, by the end maybe they will be getting a mark higher than mine, so I felt like I was competing, I don't mind giving my efforts to other students because I was giving them my copybook to make photocopies, but what I mind is explaining because in the exam I don't put what I write on the copybook, I write what I understand, and if I explain to you; then you might get a better mark than me. (Lina. Formal student interview)

Thus, in terms of competitive attitudes, these students demonstrated frustration to engage in group works activities where power dynamics seems to take place through students imposing their authority or leadership on the group. Also, students seemed to prefer pair work as it allows them to engage in positive competition with a member and share their ideas respectively. More than that, students also expressed their uneasiness to be in group works which are assessed. Further details are provided in the following discussions about dependency in group work activities.

6.2.2.3. Dependency

Alongside the issue of competitive attitudes, participants referred to dependency in group work activities. Students claimed that they reluctantly engage in formal group work tasks that are monitored by teachers, and others even went to claim a resistance towards this type of classroom activities.

Lina explicated her perspective regarding the issue of dependency in group work tasks in the following extract:

Actually, I have a problem with working in groups at the university level, I don't like it and I don't enjoy it apart from when I work with students whom I know. If it's imposed by the teacher I would do it reluctantly, because most of the members of the group don't work seriously, it always ends up me or my friend doing the work while the others writing their names down with us. Sometimes we do work collaboratively, we were six students, we were all working seriously on a project, everyone brought their part, but sometimes there is dependency. (Lina. Formal Student Interview)

Lina first referred to the interpersonal aspect of working in groups when she can choose who she works with. Then she explained the challenges faced in groups and tasks assigned by the teacher. The problem of having only few members working together and others benefiting from the outcome seem to be overriding. This is mainly when emphasis is placed on the product of the group work by adding grades and assessment to the task. I observed this issue even when students could decide on the group members, there were still students in groups who seemed disengaged. The following event showed dependency group work activities:

'They had internet, we did not'

> Forty-five minutes was left from the session. Rosa asked her students to form groups of six students. Students putted chairs randomly and formed their groups. Rosa promised that the best work will get the group one extra point in the exam. The task consisted of writing a small article introducing Algeria. In each group of six, one student had a paper and pen and two or less were holding their smartphones to translate and look for extra information on the internet. Three other students, in some groups and four in others, were listening, they did not seem to contribute at all; only those holding smartphones and the one writing appeared interacting with each other. The classroom was noisy, some students were debating on which ideas should be written first. The rush was to write as much information as possible. The session time was about to end, and students asked Rosa for extra minutes. I went to the first group who handed their sheet and asked: how was your task? A student said: it's unfair to give us only 45 minutes to do this and to give 1 point for one group only because we all worked hard. I asked a student who seemed disengaged: what part of the work you did, [pretending that I did not notice her disengagement]? The student answered me: they had internet, we did not have data on our phones [referring to two other students who were also silent], we were not able to dictate our parts. (Classroom Observation. 26th, Nov, 19)

In this observation note, all the groups had students who were working on the task and students who seemed disengaged. It was noticeable for me that students with internet on their phones were taking the lead, and the other students did not interfere. The process seemed to go smoothly as students who were mainly silent did not appear to be bothered by others who were taking the lead and vice versa. In an exchange with a Malay teacher, he considered this to be normal in most group works 'in classrooms, as in small groups, there are always drivers and parasites' (Leon. Informal Chat).

I also noticed that Rosa did not walk around and checked how the process of the group work was taking place. The emphasis was on students completing and submitting the task.

Next, I explain how participants approached the issue of dependency.

'Too much is not good for a team'

The issue of dependency can be resolved according to some participants by minimising the number of students in each group which resonates with what has already been stated about students preferring to work in pairs. Also grading students individually was considered a technique to diminish dependency. Sanaa explained:

A group of four is fine but more than that seven or six is too much. Pairs are good too, but group number should be a five or less. Too much is not good for a team (…) what's the point of working in a team if we don't share our ideas all together? The point of a team is sharing ideas and selecting them to make something out of it. (Fieldnotes. Sanaa Informal chat)

Yahya pointed out:

In group work [*referring to presentations*], I don't give them the same mark. The day of presentation I know who worked and who just wrote his name. Students are clever, you know! They think that the teacher can't see who worked and who didn't. I always have students coming to me complaining that they found different marks on the board for the same group, and then I remind them that I know that they just memorised their parts, they did not actually work on them. (Fieldnotes. Yahya. Informal chat)

Dependency is often found in groups constituting of a large number of students. Most students referred to their preference toward pair work as it grants them more opportunities to share and work comfortably. Teachers are found to be aware of such issues regarding dependency in group work. Yet, their interference seemed to be minimal as the outcome of group work has been given importance over the process of engaging students together.

These findings support the notion of free riding as a 'major setback' to the success of group activities (Hall and Buzwell, 2012) and Refeque, Balakrishnan and Inan Harji (2017) recommend that group work marks should be given individually based on the contribution of each student.

From these comments and data, I believe participants offered a puzzling notion of engagement in group work activities. While the teachers reflected the same sense of authority similar to that of structuring classroom participation mentioned in section (6.2), students interestingly seemed to prefer less confinements and more freedom to choose how to engage in group work activities. The concluding comments of this section are that students prefer engaging in group work tasks that are not monitored or assessed by teachers, they prefer pair work in the classroom and give priority to the interpersonal aspect in deciding who to work with over the academic aspect. Teachers, despite being aware of the importance of the heterogeneous aspect of allocating roles in group work, they seemed unaware of the importance of explaining the process to students. Therefore, the communication aspect is

important and can affect students' emotions, thus students' willingness to engage in teachers' instructed group works.

6.3. Ambivalent approaches to teaching and the primacy of speaking skills

Having seen how classroom participation preferences and forms of participation altered students' engagement in the different forms of classroom activities, it seems of paramount importance now to look at how lessons, modules and teaching approaches affect the amount, quality and demands for students' oral engagement.

To start, all participants agreed on the importance of oral participation in the classroom. Moreover, they perceived the oral production module as the arena where speaking should mostly be practiced. However, there seemed to be

Linking this section to the previous chapter I believe participants manifested some inconsistencies when stating their perceptions about students' silence in the classroom not only in relation to achievement and grades as indicators for students' learning but also in relation to the concept of engagement in general. Sanaa expressed this inconsistency when she admitted that students need to speak:

> In the classroom, I don't think silence should be very used because the students need to express themselves in some way or another, and silence is not going to do them very well. I know that I'm a bit silent, but I don't like that about myself, sometimes I want to talk I just can't.' (Sanaa. Formal Student Interview).

This was a statement from the same student who had indicated she was no longer silent, and that silence did not affect her learning or grades. Additionally, Rima who claimed that she is mostly silent because of shyness and I concluded that the meta-conceptions affected her perception of self, expressed frustration towards the institution regarding managing modules. She explained:

> In classrooms, we should talk, to develop our skills (…) my aim is to learn how to speak, we know how to write, it's good that we learn about linguistics, grammar and stuff but what about speaking? We did not have the chance to develop it. We did not study Oral in our first year; the teacher came only for exams, so we did the exam without actually studying. We complained a lot, but they did not do anything. I want to learn how to speak; teachers need to teach us how to speak so that we can speak about any topic, we need the basics of communication. (Rima. Formal Student Interview).

Both arguments demonstrated these students' eagerness to speak in a classroom and reflected a frustration of being silent as in the case of Sanaa or deprived from the opportunity to orally participate and learn how to speak as in the case of Rima. Also, an important note from Rima demonstrates that not all students are involved in the same quality of teaching and learning. This point of view was further evidenced by teachers' statements regarding their approach in teaching different modules, providing feedback and assessment to students. The following sets of findings provide ethnographic details of the different idiosyncratic approaches that teachers claimed using in their teaching which I believe have an impact on students' attitudes in learning different modules, participation and engagement in different tasks.

6.3.1. Perceptions of teaching approaches 'I've never been to a real training'

The issue which seems to reside in modules teaching is the unsettled approaches claimed to be followed by teachers and which appear to have an idiosyncratic professional foundation. These approaches seem to make students fit in the teaching practice rather than adapting the teaching practice to students' needs.

Along with the perceived primacy of the speaking skills, a teacher described his approach to teaching the oral production module which consists of developing students' speaking and listening skills:

> In oral production for instance, I tell them that this module in Arabic is called "Elhadra" [*Speaking or talking in Algerian dialectal Arabic, sometimes denotes over speaking*] it means you have to speak, grammar does not make you speak, linguistics the same, phonetics the same, but with me I will make you speak because the module says so, I tell them: I will be clear with you from the start, I try to help you, but the more you talk the more you get, you say none you get none. (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

Yahya's explanation of his beliefs about teaching the oral production module were personal and reflected his own perceived appropriate approach. He believed that theoretical modules or lessons which require a lecturing style such as: linguistics, grammar and phonetics do not compel students to speak. This statement contradicts what he said previously in section 5.6.2 about being bothered by silent students in the module of linguistics. According to data, these idiosyncratic convictions seemed to emerge from the absence of teacher training and a clear codified pedagogy:

Yahya further explained the perceived primacy of the speaking skill that he used to believe in at the early stages of his career and the effects of the lack of training on his teaching approach:

> At the beginning of my career I did not know that listening should be taught in Oral sessions. I spent years teaching speaking only, maybe because we did not have training or maybe because of the lack of equipment, but now I regret it, I think they are both important though I am no longer teaching Oral' (Yahya. Informal Chat).

According to his statement, his teaching approach was based on what he personally perceived to be appropriate for teaching. The same idea was shared by another teacher who explained this vague and ambivalent approach to teaching by spontaneous:

> My teaching style, I would call it spontaneous, I am not really familiar with teaching methods or even their names, I've never been to a real training, so to me it's rather spontaneous, because if I don't feel spontaneous I wouldn't be doing these things [*referring to the way she teaches*]. (Wissal. Formal teacher Interview)

This conceptualisation of this form of teaching, as well as these teachers' fuzzy beliefs about their approaches to teaching different modules gave the impression that little attention is given to the modules requirements, students' differences and students' expectations. However, despite these seemingly uninformed approaches, as well as the lack or absence of teacher training, subsequent data revealed that teachers' claimed approaches responded to the shared belief amongst all participants that classrooms are sites for oral engagement.

The following sets of data explain how each of the teachers developed their experiential approach in teaching:

6.3.1.1. 'Students used to escape their classes and come to attend my class'

Rosa believes that all modules should take into consideration developing students' oral skills, including listening. She said:

> I can tell you that I focus more on the oral skills, I focus more on negotiating skills between me and my students, I focus more on speaking and listening, I make the students active practitioners in their learning, and also my target behind teaching any module is to make them learn by themselves, or learner-centeredness. (Rosa. Teacher Formal Interview)

Rosa had the noisiest classes, her approach focused on getting students to speak and participate without the constraints of turns or waiting for her to give permission and she was the only one who moved around the classroom constantly and physically reached to students who were sitting in the back. She explained that teaching is an idiosyncratic practice that has nothing to do with the module being taught. She said:

> I remember in my first year of teaching, I was teaching methodology and didactics and we were only two teachers specialised in that, all the others were civilization and literature specialists, and students used to escape their classes and come to attend my class which is not even their specialty, and they were not only one or two students but the whole groups, and that caused a lot of problems to the other teachers.
>
> I asked: What do you think brought them to attend your sessions?
>
> What brought them to my class is the way I teach, for me for example in the amphi-theatre I don't sit, it means I get nearer to the students I approach them, and I don't use dictation or papers ..etc. I prepare my own lessons, and even if it's a lecture, I use the same way as in a TD or in a TP [*referring to practical work and workshops*], I involve them. (Rosa. Formal Teacher Interview)

In this extract of data, Rosa reports an incident which happened 13 years ago at the beginning of her career. I can assume that her approach in teaching is what another teacher referred to it by 'spontaneous' where no defined elements of approaches and methods are being followed instead. it is the teacher's practice needs analysis which drives the teaching.

Rosa connected the efficiency of her teaching style with the incident of having other students from other specialities escaping their classes to attend hers. She believes that teaching any module should build on developing speaking skills and nurturing discussions as Ryma said: 'topics and classes which are open for discussions and opinions like in oral sessions; I like them more, I feel a little bit at ease when I participate there because they are not meant to judge us on a word or two.' (Ryma. Student Formal Interview).

Rosa deliberately believes in the importance of oral skills for students' learning, and her practice is meant to engage students for the sake of learning the language.

6.3.1.2. 'I was teaching myself how to teach'

Wissal takes a similar stand in relying on oral skills in her class yet for a different reason. She said:

> For literary analysis, since I have started teaching for the very beginning I did not know how to evaluate my students, and evaluate myself at the same time, so it was always

important for me to get their feedback [*referring to oral responsiveness*] to see whether I'm on the right track or not, because there was no other teacher inside the room to tell me if I was doing well. So, I kind of was teaching myself how to teach. This became one basic element, that having the feedback of students always helps me to centre myself and evaluate myself. Another thing, is when teaching Literary Analysis I always need to know what my students are thinking about because literature is a matter of interpretation, we'll be having different interpretations, and I want to make them feel confident about their own interpretations because if they don't trust their readings, they will always be using internet to find answers and they will be relying on plagiarism more, so one part of pushing them and making them speak in class is meant to help them also trust their interpretations and their way of seeing things and these are not things that they are going to find on internet. (Wissal. Formal teacher Interview)

In this extract, Wissal associates the effectiveness of her teaching with the oral responsiveness of her students. In chapter 5, I mentioned that Wissal perceived silent students at the beginning of her career to be either uninterested in the course or do not understand her explanations. Wissal also mentions that she evaluates herself through her students' interaction and participation. Her students' participation reflected her ability to explain and deliver the lesson. The third fold is to evaluate her students' understanding through their oral contributions.

What we can understand from Wissal's answer is that her goal from having sessions focused on oral contribution is not for the aim of developing speaking skills. Her teaching style needs as a beginner teacher shaped the deliverance of the course.

6.3.1.3. 'I had no experience at all with handling discussions'

Amel is a teacher who believed that the module is what shapes the teaching style:

In the beginning of my career, I used to teach linguistics, I used to follow lecturing, I enter to the classroom, I give them the information/lecture and that's it, but since last year [*3rd year of experience*] I started discussing things with my students, I ask them questions, not give them all what they have to know at once, I try to ask them, brainstorm their ideas, I ask them if they have any ideas about the lecture, I encourage them to give anything they know even though it's not correct, the most important thing is that we discuss together, later I provide them with the summary or the lecture. (Amel. Teacher Form Interview)

Amel held the idea that Linguistics is a theoretical module which does not require 'give and take efforts' (Zina. Informal Teacher Chat). She later explained to me that changing her teaching style was because of two factors; experience and module requirements.

Amel said: 'there is difference between linguistics which I used to teach and written production which I teach now, but I probably chose lecturing at the beginning of my career as I had no experience at all with handling discussions, I was shy, and as you know we still have not applied learner-centredness' (Amel. Follow up Teacher Interview). Unlike Wissal, Amel preferred lecturing in delivering her lessons instead of discussions between her and her students. Here, we can see that she required minimum interaction skills from her students' part. This is due to her lack of experience and training. From a students' perspective, Sanaa explained that: 'the work of a teacher is very hard, because they should provide this environment where everyone feels at ease, but what we see is [*shrugging her shoulders*] some of them they just don't care, and sometimes others they would just come teach and leave the class as if they were never there' (Sanaa. Formal Student Interview)

Sanaa expectations from any course is to have room for discussions and expressing oneself. This approach was later adopted by Amel when she started teaching written expression.

Written production is a practical module, where students have two workshops directed only for activities. As the name implies, written production is about writing rather than speaking, but Amel thinks that discussions help students better develop their language skills and it keeps them engaged in her course. She said:

> I started doing this because I don't want for my students to be passive learners, I want them to be active, interact with me. I don't want to come to the classroom give them the lecture, they write it down and then we part away. I prefer to discuss things and be active, this is my favourite way of teaching. If they are active, I'll be active if they're passive and all of them are silent then I won't feel like they are learning. (Amel. Formal Teacher Interview)

We can see here how Amel's view of classroom interaction changed after three years of experience. She started associating students' oral interaction with 'activeness' and learning. The course became no longer the indication of which form of interaction is expected from students.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter covered the main teaching and learning practices found in the setting. First, it tackled the perceived role of the teacher in the classroom. The teacher is expected to be in control, take the lead, and be responsible on students' turn-taking and participation distribution. Most silent students preferred to participate in structured participation. For most of them, if they cannot volunteer to speak, structured participation obliges them to do. Among the patterns of participation found in the field: hand raising, speaking one after one, and asking for permission before talking. Most teachers and also students referred to teacher-centredness as the approach followed in the setting. Even for teachers who claimed following an ambivalent approach, their practices reflected some of features of teacher-centredness.

This chapter highlighted also the way silent students engage in group work activities. Two forms of group work were mentioned: formal and informal. Unlike other forms of participation, silent students preferred informal group work task because they lack structure and control from the teacher. They choose their friends and they work in environment that is not characterised with dependency and competitiveness.

Finally, in the last section I provided some insight on teachers' beliefs regarding the importance of oral engagement in the classroom and where do their beliefs come from.

Most teachers considered oral participation important, but they mentioned that in some modules, they do not require students to orally engage. They mentioned that their beliefs mainly come from their teaching and learning experiences as most of them reported that they did not attend any teacher training in their career. Some teachers referred to their teaching approaches as intuitive and spontaneous.

In the following chapter, I further explain how teachers' lack of training may have affected the way they assess their students.

Chapter 7

The effects of Assessment on Students' Silence in the Language Classroom

7. Introduction

The previous chapters provided an understanding of the different perceptions about classroom silence, its nature and the different forms of classroom participation and preferred ways of oral engagement for teachers and students. It also showed how students changed their roles and positions when talking about their silence and participation in different learning environments. This chapter tackles further issues related to different forms of assessments, feedback, and the grading system that are found in the setting and which are closely linked to the reasons which students found important when talking about classroom silence.

In this chapter, I try to explain nature of corrective feedback that is provided to students, the different forms of assessments, and the basic upon which teachers give grades to students. This chapter also explain some of the contradictions which appeared in teachers' data regarding integrating classroom oral participation in all forms of assessments and then being resilient with silent students who can prove to be competent through other forms of assessments.

In the fifth chapter, I discussed how self-perception of academic knowledge had an impact on students' classroom performance where a negative self-perception led them to be silent. In this chapter, I discuss how unsystematic feedback and assessment can affect students' self-perception of knowledge and lead them to be silent. I also discuss how students' perceptions of accents were among the factors which made students feel proud and competent.

7.1. Inconsistent Feedback and the Ideal User of English

It is relevant to first clarify that feedback appeared particularly in the data covering why students intentionally chose to be silent. Inconsistent feedback refers to the persistence and repetitive pattern of providing comments which do not address the lesson goals. The ideal use of English are sets of beliefs that students and teachers have about the appropriate use of the English language. It addresses the grammatical accuracy of the language and a perceived accuracy of English accents. These two strands are considered problematic once accompanied with inconsistent feedback and with unrealistic expectations from the language user.

7.1.1. Teachers corrective feedback and students' mistakes

Sometimes the feedback that teachers provide to students does not align with the task or lesson objectives. Most teachers were observed providing inconsistent feedback, minimising the wait-time, using feedback as a reprimanding tool, and focusing heavily on correcting grammatical mistakes. Many students claim that they choose to be silent which is their risk-free strategy to avoid embarrassment and save their face from excessive corrections and appearing incompetent.

In a classroom observation, Wissal and her students were collaboratively working to build an essay using a word document projected on the whiteboard. Students raised their hands to participate. Wissal selected students who shared their pieces of writing orally. After that, Wissal reformulated certain ideas and typed them down on her computer. Ikram was a student who raised her hand on every occasion and appeared ready and interested to share her answers. However, I observed that her attitude changed when the teacher kept on correcting her pronunciation and grammatical mistakes.

> Ikram was sitting near the desk of the teacher. She had her copybook open and she was repeatedly checking it. This indicated to me that she had prepared herself for this lesson. She first answered many of the teacher's warm-up questions. The lesson started and she was given permission to read her paragraph; she pronounced "excerpt" as "expert", the teacher corrected her immediately, then she continued and said: "the author have" instead of "has", the teacher intervened immediately and corrected her. Ikram giggled each time the teacher intervened (...). She was given the opportunity the participate several times and she was corrected again. After that I noticed that she raised her hand,

then putted it down quickly, she checked her answer with her friend and raised her hand again, shortly after that, she putted it down again and checked her copybook and attentively listened to the others who were participating. (Classroom Observation. November 2019.)

In this event, the teacher was observed interrupting the student while providing immediate corrective feedback. The student mispronounced many words and had some grammatical mistakes. However, the task was about collectively writing the essay where the teacher and students first listen to each other and build on each other's ideas of how to write a literary text analysis. The teacher did not provide feedback on the content of Ikram's essay. Eventually, the student was observed doubting herself and hesitating because of the interruptive corrective feedback on her mistakes. She checked her copybook and compared with her friend, and after raising her hand and putting it down several times, she completely withdrew from oral participation.

In the formal interview, Wissal mentioned that she rarely corrects her students' grammatical or pronunciation mistakes. In chapter six, there was an incident when Wissal mentioned that her approach into teaching is spontaneous and does not follow particular teaching methods as she claimed that she does not have any knowledge about them because she did not receive teacher training:

> I don't usually like to correct the students' pronunciation or grammatical mistakes, I don't do it that much, because I don't want to interrupt them while speaking, because I know if I'm going to stop them to correct the /s/ or the /ed/, they are going to forget what they are saying, sometimes it's even, maybe, makes them feel uncomfortable so I tend to let them finish the idea. If I remember to correct them, I do, but if I don't, I let it go. But when I notice that the students do a lot of grammatical mistakes, I do correct them. (Wissal. Teacher Formal Interview)

The difference between Wissal's actual practice in the classroom and her ideal practice reflects that her teaching is as she claimed before to be intuitive. Feedback for Wissal is a practice embedded in her belief system about the appropriate use of English.

Several teachers are found to provide feedback that is inconsistent to the activity which students are involved in. Some teachers show unawareness to the types and purposes of the

corrective feedback and randomly provide it with little attention to whether the course is fluency-based or accuracy-based.

I attended an oral session with first-year students who were asked to present dialogues in pairs. In this session, the teacher used explicit teacher-led feedback focusing mainly on language:

> Before students started their presentations, the teacher told them that the best pair presentation will have an extra mark in test. The first pair presented their dialogue, students were listening, and the teacher was observed taking notes. After they finished, the teacher asked them to say again specific lines from the dialogue, she then corrected the grammatical mistakes. Each time the sentence was unclear, she stared at them for seconds showing that she is trying to find a better way to say it. Sometimes, when she did not understand, she would ask them to write the words on the whiteboard and then she corrected the pronunciation or suggested another word. No feedback was given on the way they presented or the presentation itself; feedback was related to grammar and pronunciation. She also did not ask other students what they think about their classmates' presentations. She gave this kind of feedback to all students except for two students whose level was clearly advanced from the way they spoke; she decided to give them the one extra mark. (Field notes. OP session, 1st year students)

Those were first year students in their first semester at university. The teacher used explicit feedback to correct grammatical mistakes in an oral production session where the focus is generally on developing students' confidence speak and participate with others.

In this classroom observation, I think that students were expecting to receive feedback from their teacher: 'The students stood next to the desk of their teacher. They maintained eye contact with the teacher and did not change their position to look towards the rest of the group' (Field notes. OP session, 1st year students). In a very similar incident, which happened with one of my participants:

> Anne and two other students were expected to present a short paragraph in an oral session. The teacher asked them to do it at the end of the session. This was an activity related to the previous lecture. It was a large class in a U shape. Anne stood in the middle of the classroom in front of the teacher. The other students were looking at her back. She delivered her presentation to the teacher; she ignored her peers, and they did not seem involved with her presentation either. (Classroom Observation. Oral Production)

I focused on the body language of these students to explain that students consider presentations as a product for the teacher, and they expect it to be assessed respectively. Therefore, we see that their body was facing the teacher and their eye contact was only with the teacher. Students in the group were not involved: they were not asked to comment or give their feedback to the students. Noura commented: 'they don't know how to speak or give feedback to each other. They are still in their first year. So, I give all the feedback so they can at least learn something [*referring to grammar*]' (Noura. Teacher informal chat).

In this statement the teacher regarded her students uncapable of providing feedback to each other. She also assumed that correcting the grammatical mistakes is the type of feedback that I inquired about. Yahya had a different opinion regarding providing first year students with corrective feedback. He pointed out:

> When I teach Oral, I need students to practice. Let's say a good teacher should set up goals for the academic year, many goals. I only set one goal for first year students, only one and I am not ashamed to say it which is to break students' anxiety, I don't care about vocabulary, intonation, pronunciation, the way they produce language I don't care about them at all. However, when it comes to second year, I will mortify you *[he used a dialectal Arabic word which stands for terrorizing/humiliating someone with insults]*; you should have learned how to say words properly, as you can see, the focus changes here. (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

In this statement Yahya gives priority to developing students' confidence in using the language. Yahya said previously that Oral sessions are designed for speaking only and he already mentioned that he gives minimum interference when his students are engaged in a discussion. Then, he mentioned that his role in teaching changes from encouraging students to speak to assessing students when they speak. According to him, second year because students are expected to be able to communicate properly. He mentioned:

> For me now *[he means when students start using the language, he previously said it starts from their second year at university]*, whenever I hear a mistake I comment, in today's lesson a student was answering a question and said: there is two criteria, I instantly stopped her and said there are. There are some pronunciation mistakes like "variety" they pronounce it in the French way (variété) so I instantly correct them, "idiolect" they pronounce it with an /ai/ not an /i /, so what I want to say is that I do it as much as I can, however, when I feel that the student is so into it, I do my intervention

when he/she finishes because I don't want to cut the flow of their ideas. (Yahya, Formal Interview)

At first, there appears to be a disagreement between Yahya and Noura regarding correcting first year students. However, Yahya the same as Wissal intervenes whenever a student makes a pronunciation mistake. Rosa on the other hand believes that corrective feedback is to be given to students in accuracy-based lessons. She associates linguistic competence with accuracy and communicative competence with fluency. She also argues that interrupting students to correct them is deemed to restrict students' voluntariness to speak:

> I don't usually correct my students, for me I consider communicative competence as a priority, and then it comes the linguistic competence, I leave the appropriateness and correctness of the language to the grammar teachers, but for the modules I teach, I try to focus more on fluency than on accuracy, I don't correct at once, I leave my students be spontaneous, because believe me if you stop them, if you correct them this will handicap their use of the language, they will be embarrassed, they will think 'whenever I try to speak she will stop me', but here I must say that when I notice that the mistakes they make will remedy by time, I don't correct them- to tell the truth- but when the mistake is something that we can't close our eyes on, I let them finish, and by the end I comment on the answer and then say that we say it like this like "information without s", it's only when it's a really serious mistake, and I always tell them don't focus on pronunciation, focus on the message, whether the interlocutor understands you or not! (Rosa. Teacher Formal Interview)

This excerpt shows that Rosa's corrective feedback is nuanced by theoretical notions which can be considered problematic since she believes that linguistic competence is separate from the communicative competence. She also restricts language correctness and appropriateness to grammar sessions. Despite her statement that she rarely corrects her students and that she wants them to be spontaneous, she draws attention to discourse competence which she referred to by 'focus on the message, whether the interlocutor understands you or not'. So, Rosa understands that intensive corrective feedback impedes students' voluntariness to participate, therefore, she prioritises the clarity of her students' contribution over grammatical accuracy.

Wissal also referred to communicative competence as separate from the linguistic one. She explains why some teachers tend to over correct their students' grammatical mistakes by:

I think teachers want to do that constantly, because these students are future teachers of English, so they should be able to use the language correctly, that's why teachers would focus more on the language use, but for me both of them: linguistic and communicative competence are important. (Wissal. Teacher Formal Interview)

From students' perspective, I have already mentioned that some students struggle with negative perception of academic knowledge which prevents them from speaking in class see section 5.5. This fear is generally associated with fear of harsh judgement or corrections from teachers or students.

In the same vein, conditioning speaking with the use of accurate language may affect students' willingness to talk and participate as in Ikram's case. Linda also points out:

I used to think a lot about my grammatical mistakes which prevented me from speaking because I keep rehearsing what I want to say in my head, but then I saw a video on YouTube, they say that we should not give too much importance to the structure of sentences and words, because when we speak, we should focus on the meaning more than the form. (Linda. Formal Student Interview)

A similar statement stated by Lina: 'some teachers did correct us, some others would laugh at us, and say this is not the way how to say it, and this made me very embarrassed, especially in first year.' (Lina, Formal Student Interview)

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that some teachers neglected the needs of students regarding learning certain aspects of the language, they also taught in ways that met their teaching expertise rather than the meeting the goals of a module. A simple example can be shifting the focus of an oral lesson to explaining grammar points

This argument is further discussed in the following section where feedback appear to be reprimanding instead of making students aware of their mistakes. This according to many students is perceived as a threat for them which lead to oral disengagement.

7.1.2. Reprimanding Feedback: 'I'm still learning!'

Previously, I discussed the issue of unsystematic corrective feedback that teachers use correct students' pronunciation and grammar mistakes and how it can lead to students' oral disengagement. Following this, I shall explain how reprimanding feedback affect students' emotional state and feeds on feelings of inferiority and embarrassment. I start with

describing how teachers reprimand students and then present the perspective of students on being reprimanded and how much is it important for them to be corrected nicely because they are still in the process of learning.

In Linguistics and Grammar sessions, I observed Zina who is an experienced female teacher. The following fieldnote describes her behaviour in one session:

> Zina has a French accent; her English words sound like French. I noticed that each time she is not sure of a word, she writes it on the board and asks her students to check the spelling on their dictionaries. She comments on true and false answers either with nodding her head, or with saying: yes and no. She gives no feedback to the oral mistakes (Field Notes).

I started with describing the behaviour of Zina to show that she did not care about her students' pronunciation mistakes or lack of fluency. Also, most of her questions did not require students to extend on ideas. In one of her grammar sessions:

> She walked through tables to check the activity her students were doing; each time she found a mistake, she pointed by her finger to the worksheet and looked at the student by the side of her eyes. It appeared that many students had wrong answers. She then went to the front of the classroom and spoke angrily, [*yelling*] that she has no time to waste on the basics of English. She switched to French and said: [*using French*] it is very stupid to be at a university level and do not know how to formulate a Yes/No question. She then using a threatening them that all of this will be in the exam (…) (Classroom observation, Grammar session. November 2019.)

This incident reveals Zina's intolerance towards her students' grammatical mistakes. It also shows that Zina started reprimanding her students before asking them to share their answers in public. Finally, she switched to French while reprimanding them on their English language mistakes. The teacher asked the students to perform the exercise and just after they will be answering the questions one by one. The teacher decided to check on students and went with reprimanding them before the exercise was finished. In my opinion, her way of dealing with her students was harsh especially that used a threatening voice. In addition to that, tasks performed in a written form received Zina's attention more than the oral mistakes since she teaches grammar which is reasonable.

Based on the previous sets of data, I believe that teachers would correct whatever they see appropriate and most teachers focused on grammar in all lessons, being accuracy-based or

fluency-base. Teachers also expected a certain level of competency from students and based on that, they give their feedback. Anne stated:

> I really like when I get corrected about my mistakes, I do love English, and I want to learn more and more. Last year, I was still in my first year, the teacher was dictating, and you know that my language wasn't that improved, so she said "word" and I couldn't hear, I asked her Mrs: is it "world or word". She then said 'world' angrily and she spelled it for me. I felt so embarrassed, so I really love to get corrected when I'm wrong but nicely because I am still learning. (Anne. Student Formal Interview)

In a very similar incident, Wissam said:

> Sometimes I accept to get out of a session without understanding a single word, and I don't ask the teacher about the things that I did not understand because what's important for me is to not get embarrassed. We have this teacher who every time we ask a question, he laughs and then starts explaining, and I hate this, he says: "you don't know this, it's obvious!" Well, It's not! I'm still learning here. (Wissam. Formal Student Interview)

These two students explained that receiving teachers' negative comments on their clarification requests make them feel uncomfortable and prevent them from asking again. Another student expressed their uneasiness to fit within her group because of her fear of the teacher's comments:

> Sometimes I do feel rejected by the teacher, even when I want to say something, I can't, I just remain silent because honestly, I don't feel comfortable at all with my classmates. I am afraid that the teacher would make me feel stupid if I don't answer correctly. (Diary 5)

In the above data, show how those students prefer remaining silent than being corrected in a harsh way. Students who experienced reprimanding feedback can dissociate with the group and do not feel they belong to it.

From the data, the teacher above is focused on students' mastery of that lesson. She could have explained it before, and that session was only for practice. However, when students are engaged in doing an activity, they should be allowed time and space first, and they are expected to learn from their mistakes. The students appeared to be focused on their process of learning: 'Well, it's not obvious, I'm still learning here'. The teacher, in my opinion, focused on the product 'no time to waste on the basics of English'. These two disparities lead students to feel 'rejected by the teacher'.

In section 5.2. I referred to teachers' behaviour as a major factor leading students to be silent and choosing oral disengagement. Students claimed that they feel at ease when speaking in classes where teachers who praise their contributions and do not shame them when they make mistakes. The emotional experience of students in the classroom is generally associated with teachers' behaviour. When being reprimanded, students mostly choose silence for their fear of losing face and making mistakes. This generally leads to a negative self-image and negative perception of academic knowledge. See section 5.5

This section then presented how teachers approach feedback in various lessons. The findings suggest that most feedback focus on grammatical mistakes. Teachers were observed providing corrective feedback with little consideration to lesson goals, focusing heavily on grammatical accuracy, and use reprimanding corrective feedback. Research works in language teaching explain that correcting students repeatedly can affect students' interest of learning (Ellis, 2013; Harmer, 2007; Ur, 1996).

From a socio-cultural perspective, cultural values are important in educational practices. In a study across 49 countries on students' mathematics achievement 'feedback on mistakes was associated with better achievement in countries where authority is expected to be more important (namely, countries that are high on power distance and religiosity)' (Eriksson et al, 2020, p. 11). There is no intention to argue about students' achievement in this study, however, I should note that almost all of the students participating in this research are high achievers who received top grades in their groups.

Power distance and excessive teacher's authority as argued in section 6.3. affect participation dynamics, and the teacher's authoritative role in high power distance societies may at the same time provide a barrier for other teaching practices such as self-evaluation and peer-assessment (Brown et al., 2009; Carless and Lam, 2014; Thanh Pham and Renshaw, 2015). These studies findings align with my findings about teachers who consider their feedback more important for students because it has teaching value compared to that of their students.

In the following lines, I further expand the issue of feedback and assessment, and explain the negative perceptions of peer feedback and its effects also on students' participation in the language classroom.

7.1.3. Peer feedback: 'It's a classroom, not a war zone'

Peer feedback is perceived negatively among students in this study. This is mentioned among the reasons which lead students to avoid speaking in the classroom. Data regarding this matter were mostly reported in students' diaries. In both formal and informal interviews, students mentioned their teachers as the source of negative feedback and stated that they avoid providing feedback to their peers because it would be considered as a criticism for them.

Wissam mentioned in her follow-up interview:

> Students generally avoid giving feedback to each other, I tend to do it sometimes, but they don't accept it, sometimes I ask questions during their presentations, and they feel like I'm judging them, they often give me that face "we talk later outside" [*an irony for picking a fight with someone outside*]. (Wissam. Follow-up Interview)

Sanaa, Zeyneb and Nour shared the same view as the one above. Wissam referred to a belief among people that questioning or asking for more explanations regarding what a student said is a form of devaluing or affronting them.

Rosa mentioned that students tend to correct each other in her classroom. She stated that she tells them at the start of the academic year that correcting each other is not acceptable in her classroom. Two major things can be understood here: peer feedback is only associated with correction like that of teachers, and it is considered a confrontation. Peer feedback is not perceived as a tool for learning. Rosa explained:

> What I don't like in my classroom is when students correct each other randomly, especially when they do it in a ridiculous way as if they are laughing on the student who commit the mistake, at the early beginning I tell them never correct each other. (Rosa. Teacher Formal Interview)

What I understand from this statement is that students and teachers do not negotiate ideas or opinions. Feedback so far is only viewed tackling mistakes rather than exchanging opinions.

Furthermore, students wrote in their diaries that among their reasons for remaining silent in the classroom is the negative feedback of their peers.

> Sometimes I can't speak because others say things first and they say it in a rude way that makes me feel frustrated and I just wish I can say something back, but it's a classroom not a warzone… I wish students stop comparing each other's level in English because they make

others feel uncomfortable and being fluent in English doesn't make you anything, I'm fluent but I never bother others or comment bad things to them. (Diary 3)

Similarly:

I remain silent because the teacher doesn't listen to me and sometimes some classmates make fun of what I say, they find it stupid. If I had the power to change anything, I would oblige students to respect and accept different opinions and make the teacher work with all students not just the excellent ones. (Diary 4)

Almost all students who participated in writing the diary mentioned that feeling afraid of negative feedback stopped them from participating and speaking in the classroom. They all mentioned that there are students and teachers who tend to mock their accent, their English and even their opinions.

From the data, it appears that there is a tendency for individualist learning and that constructing knowledge together and helping each other through feedback and comments is not often facilitated or perceived positively. Understanding how students are centred within feedback enables us to understand how agency is represented through such practices and why peer-assessment and feedback is echoed with negativity and criticism. The findings in this sub-section are analysed as possible reasons for students' silence. As I argued on many occasions, prior experience and the socio-cultural background should be considered in understanding students' silence. In a similar way, rejecting peer-feedback can also be a result of those negative prior-learning experiences and some socio-cultural beliefs that are not in favour of co-construction of knowledge.

By looking beyond the individual level, Nieminen et al, (2021) emphasised the need for looking into students' agency within a social, cultural, historical and political structures of assessment and feedback as this will drive the focus toward the learning environments rather than focusing solely on the students' psychological states. They claim: 'interventions on promoting agency in feedback processes should be aimed not only towards the students but towards the socio-cultural and -political environments as well.' (p.11).

From this we understand that participants denote peer-feedback negatively and it is viewd as one of their reasons for remaining silent in the classroom.

In the following, I tackle one aspect which was mentioned by students regarding some of the reasons why they feel criticised when they speak in the classroom, and which prevents them at times from participation.

7.1.4. Accents: 'but you live in England, you must know how to speak Scottish!'

In the setting, many students and teachers regard native English accents with high value. Students are keen to learn native accents and teachers tend to praise those with what they perceive a native-like accent. My silent participants did not regard their accents to be inferior to others. On the contrary, some perceived their accents to be 'native-like' and felt proud of being able to switch between accents. This eventually led them to adopt a position of a student who can use different English accents and seemed to alienate themselves from their other silent positions. Accents for silent students and others can be regarded an achievement in their learning journey. Few students, however, did not consider accents as important for their learning and did not reposition themselves when referring to accents.

Generally, the RP and American English are referred to as the native accents. In this sense, some students showed competitive attitudes when they orally participate in the classroom to show off about their accents. Also, some teachers tend to judge students' language performance based on their accent.

Many students who lack self-confidence in their accent tend to restrain from oral participation and answer questions only when asked by the teacher. Almost in every classroom I came across a student who paused for seconds because they are afraid to pronounce a word wrong. This fear is often powered by peers' facetious comments or teachers' harsh criticism.

In the following lines I shall explain my participants' different acuities about accents and its importance for their construction of their learning identities.

In a casual chat with Anne about phonetics lessons, she expressed her desire to fully acquire an RP accent. She then folded her hands under her chin and said:

> Anne: Please, try to imitate Scottish accent for me. I'd really love to learn it.
>
> I said: I'm sorry, I don't know how to do it.
>
> She said: but you live in England you must know how; I know that you can do it.
>
> I said: I live in England, not in Scotland and I am not English, I do not know even know how to imitate any of the Englishes.

Anne: for me I am trying to perfectly learn the RP and American English. I also started with Scottish recently. (Anne. Student Informal chat)

Anne explained that she highly estimates British accents. Although her first desire is to acquire the standard RP accent and American, her statement about Scottish accent made me think that she considers Native-like accents to be prestigious. She mentioned before that how lucky I am for living in England, and then she assumed that my residency in England made me able to learn different native accents. This is not harmful for her learning, because she is invested in learning, she is autonomous and showed agency regarding investing her time and energy to acquire those accents. This also change herself perceptions. 'When she spoke about learning accents, she started estimating herself more' (Field notes)

In line with this, I mentioned Lina previously who doubted her language skills and competencies. She used to feel embarrassed by her debutant accent. She explained:

> In oral production module, there was this teacher who had a perfect RP. I admired her accent, so I could not speak there because I felt I had neither the accent nor the vocabulary. In other modules, it was a bit easier for me because there were much more standard normal accents, but in her module, I always wanted to achieve her level, she never commented on anyone's accent, and I know if I spoke in her classroom that she won't care much about my debutant accent but still I felt embarrassed to speak in front of her. (Lina. Follow up Interview)

This teacher inspired Lina and made her think about working on her accent. However, while comparing her accent with that of the teacher, she felt embarrassed and incompetent which affected her self-perception and led her to be silent.

Sanaa who is also obsessed with English accents points out that she has already acquired both British and American accents and she can confidently use both. She then explained her preference towards American accent as it is intelligible to the staff and students at university, she said:

> I was a huge fan of movies: I was obsessed, I guess my accent came from there. I also memorised a lot of songs so from there too, I could speak both American and British accents, but I use more often American because here in this department they don't understand British. I tried using it a couple of times, but people did not really understand what I'm saying. (Sanaa. Students Informal Chat)

This hype of estimating the native accents can clearly show how much students are motivated to learn not only the basic skills of the English language but also to achieve a native-like proficiency in terms of speaking and pronunciation. Nevertheless, I believe that this hype towards either speaking or achieving native-like accents may create for many students like Lina self-doubt, criticism and pressure on oneself and others which may result in fear of speaking and anxiety.

Salma mentioned in an informal chat an anecdote in the exam of oral production. She said:

> In the exam, we were supposed to sit with the teacher in her desk and have a small chat with her about randomly selected topics and then she gives us a mark based on our performance in that chat. The first one who volunteered to go is a friend of mine who speaks a very native-like American English, if you saw him, you would also notice it, I mean even his hair cut, clothing... However, I think all the words he uses are informal, I feel that the content is always overlapped by his accent. So, you find the teacher very proud of him because he has such a nice accent, and even some students considered him like very competent just because of his accent, and the things he talks about are very basic sometimes. It bothers me sometimes because I feel that me and others are more competent but since we don't have a good accent, we are considered maybe mediocre. So, I always find myself wondering whether it should matter that much. (Salma. Student Informal Chat)

The opinion of Salma shows the perspective of those who do not regard accents as an important element for speaking. She did not feel under pressure to compete with those speaking with an accent. However, she mentioned that she feels mediocre because she does not receive the same encouragement and positive feedback as those who speak English imitating 'native-like' accents. Beside referring to the person's accent, she mentioned his clothing and haircut. I believe that her argument about accent interferes with the notion of identity as well. Perceiving that student imitating a foreign culture.

On the flip side, Sanaa and Wissam went further with accents and started setting ideal behaviour and expectations from their teachers of English. Sanaa and Wissam seem to judge others' proficiency through their perceptions of which accents should be used in the classroom.

They explained:

Sanaa: Here is the thing that I don't understand here [referring to university], they say we are studying British English, but we don't. We use American or even a more neutral accent, I don't understand why they say that we use it in our writing, colour with /ou/ favourite with /ou/ but we don't apply it. I mean even the speakers; the teachers do not have the British accent which they think that they have.

Wissam: Even when using the Algerian [paused for seconds] or let's say a neutral accent, we are adding an American touch to it.

Sanaa: That's a thing that I don't like here, you told me to use British, then you use it too, don't use anything else.   (Sanaa & Wissam. Fieldnotes. Students Informal Chat)

The above cases of Sanaa, Lina, Anne, Wissam and Salma showed different perspectives regarding the importance of accents for them. Almost all of them strive linked accents with competence. Even for Salma who did not care about accents, seemed think that teachers regard students with native-like accents to be more competent.

In addition to this, the silent students who showed an interest in accents and believed that they have a good accent repositioned themselves and perceived themselves competent and good language learner. Lina for instance:

I don't compare myself with other students because I kind of know that I am better, so I always strive to be like teachers and compare my performance with them' (Lina. Student Follow-up Interview).

A teacher referred to some students' behaviour regarding showing off their accents and knowledge, Israa said: 'From the students' face you kind of know that they are participating for the sake of embarrassing you or showing you as incompetent, I hate those students who brag about their language accents'. (Israa. Teacher Formal Interview)

In this statement, Israa expressed insecurity when her students show off with their accents. Such contradicting statements between participants only show the extent to which English accents in the setting are regarded.

Why can't we speak Algerian?

Each participant interpreted the importance of accent differently. Another important note that Sanaa and Wissam referred to is the Algerian or 'standard' accent. Wissam paused and rectified the word Algerian, this may reflect her disassociation of Algerian with English. She meant by standard, a neutral accent. Salma on the other hand mentioned:

> I think we all speak an Algerian accent that is intelligible. There is this one student who has a local accent, he can't pronounce /t/, he pronounces it more like a weak /d/ some would laugh at him but I don't think he cares that much because we are not natives anyway. In addition, I noticed that when I am speaking in Arabic and I switch to English, my voice changes, and my accent too. So even if it sounds Algerian it is still English. (Salma. Fieldnotes. Student Informal Chat)

Accents and pronunciation are found to be a major concern for students learning English and a concern for some teachers too. Linking this discussion to feedback, some students claimed that focusing on their English accents can devalue their efforts, as the preference of accents is personal and should not be judged as long as the student can speak and convey the message. This leads to say that feedback regarding accent is primarily based on teachers' and students' personal views. Therefore, we find these diverse positions of how students and teachers give different values to accents. In addition, those personal views can include ideologies too. In Yahya's interview, he used English and Arabic; his English was shaded with a local accent. He appeared tolerant towards students who might switch to Arabic, but he does not tolerate pronunciation mistakes, especially those including a French interference:

 'There are still students in their third-year pronouncing Linguistics as Linguistique or phonetics as phonétique [*as in French*], this is unacceptable' (Yahya, Fieldnotes. Informal chat).

To conclude this section, I mention an encouraging comment of Rosa to her student:

> 'I felt like I was listening to the BBC. You have a real British accent', said Rosa to one student. I could notice from where I was sitting at back of the classroom that almost all students whispered with one another about the teachers' comment. The student who was complemented appeared happy and shy at the same time' (Classroom observation. December 2019.)

This different incidents lead again to argue that teachers perceive accents and assess them based on what they perceive appropriate English. Yahya disliked French interference, the teacher Zina speaks English with a French accent and she switched to French on many occasions, and she did not correct any of her students' pronunciation mistakes. Rosa praised those who she thought having a nice accent. This distinction between these teachers can lead us to understand that feedback on students' accent is determined by teachers' personal beliefs.

Students' beliefs regarding accents ranged between considering accents as a goal that students strive to achieve, or an obstacle for those who think they cannot speak a perceived proper accent in front of others.

These different perceptions reflect different practices within the classroom which I believe unless stated, they can affect the dynamic of learning and teaching.

Almost all participants brought the discussion about accents without me asking about it. It can be claimed that accents take an important role in learning and speaking a language. Jacob's (2019) ethnographic work in Algeria mentioned that some teachers provided their students with harsh comments regarding their English pronunciation mistakes and choice of lexis According to Jacob, teachers have ideals regarding what is the standard English that should be used in the classroom and sometimes they extremely regard American English pronunciation as informal and for some of her participants only certain performances of RP and American English are considered "correct".

My findings align with Jacob's discussion of the authenticity of English. This section presented data on individuals' perceptions of English accents and corrective feedback in the classroom and its effects on students' speaking and silence. In line of this, corrective and reprimanding feedback that students receive from teachers and other students regarding their English pronunciation is linked to personal ideals and to the authentic representation of language. It is also clear that individuals in this study seem to alienate the belonging to English as an international language where the only two varieties mentioned are British and American Englishes. The local accent thus is considered incorrect use English language.

It might be precipitate to state that there is an 'Algerian English' but there is for sure language transfer from French, Standard Arabic, and colloquial Algerian Arabic on the pronunciation of English by students. (Ghlamallah, 2022). What is important from this section is that silent students who regard themselves having native-like accents

To conclude, English pronunciation and accents appear to have an important role for both students and teachers to judge someone's language performance and level. Silent students who considered themselves having native-like accents felt proud to speak about their accents. Their positions seemed to shift; they changed their way of talking about themselves when they started talking about accent. It is one of the elements that boosted their self-confidence and made them regard themselves competent users of English despite their silence in the classroom. Other students criticised the importance given to accents, they

preferred to focus on the quality of one's contribution and knowledge. Silent students who lack confidence in their accent resorted to silence.

7.2. Assessment through grades

Grades proved to be an important factor which students considered while engaged in any classroom activity. Grades were used by some teachers to encourage students to speak in the classroom. Other teachers included grades in their formative assessment to put pressure on students who do not speak. In the following sections, I present data which appear to be conflicting regarding when grades are used whether in oral participation or in classroom participation and whether grades are given to engaged students or to talkative students. The following sections examine in detail the grading processes found in the setting.

7.2.1. Formative assessment: 'It's the marks which terrify students, nothing else'.

Formative assessment is viewed by participants as a process which allows teachers to mark students on their performance in the classroom activities. Formative assessment includes grades that are counted by the administration in the final exams. As formative assessment is dependent on grades instead of continuous constructive feedback, it is considered by participants as both a threat and a positive reinforcement to motivate students to engage orally in the classroom. Yahya said: 'I believe that the marks play the strongest role; it's the marks which terrify students nothing else.' (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

Most teachers believe that grades are the motive that stimulate students to engage in classroom activities. Yahya points out:

> So, when I have a number of silent students, I go and play on the marks strain, I am among those who use the marks as my weapon, I tell them that we have two marks, TD *[formative assessment: generally, it takes into account presence and participation]* and exam mark [*summative assessment*]. In the TD, it's up to me to mark the student in the way that I want, because it's not obligatory for me to do it in a written test. For me, I'm motivating you not threatening you, however, students consider it as a threat. I use the TD mark as a stimulus, I am more a behaviorist; I give you a stimulus, I wait for the

response, and then I reward you. By the way, behaviorism can yield good results, it's not always bad. (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

Similarly, Wissam explained:

Sometimes even if you don't have that much of knowledge, the teacher makes you participate, but there are some teachers that if you don't have something to say, they don't care about making you speak or even think. So, it's all about the teacher, and it's the truth, I mean participation is really important, there are some teachers who give the TD mark based on participation, they remember faces and names, sometimes we don't even do a test. (Wissam. Formal Student Interview)

In this excerpt, Yahya distinguished between the TD mark and the exam mark. Yahya believes that formative assessment is included in summative assessment, and students can be tested in written form, or they can be marked on their oral participation. Wissam believes that teachers who focus on those who participate make little efforts to assess those students who do not speak. For Wissam, it is unfair for a teacher to treat silent students as incompetent because of their silence.

Yahya adds that the TD mark for those who do not participate in his class can be below average:

I give them a mark where they can't compensate it, 5 or less, but this happens only for those who do not bring topics, do not engage in discussion with others' topics, and who never said a word, for me, they are passive, present or absent is the same. (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

He mentioned that 'it's not obligatory to do it in a written test' and 'I give a stimulus and I wait for a response'. This clearly indicates that he requires oral engagement in order to assess his students. Yahya also explains his behaviourist orientation in learning. Grades are considered both a stimulus to engage students and a threat and punishment to those who do not speak.

Yahya answered when I asked why he give grades in the TD where students are supposed to be assessed formatively:

Why I do it? because some groups are completely silent, it's just me who come and speak and go each time, I give them the next session titles, I ask them to read about them to find something to say, but nothing. I tell them help me to help you, because they are in a way causing damage to their learning and to my vocal cords. When I see no response, I say: well, when you don't find a good mark in your TD don't come to

complain because that's the mark you deserve. This is one way of breaking students' silence. (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

In this quote, Yahya appear to be struggling with collective silence. According to him students are disengaged on purpose because they are given every opportunity to participate. However, from my observation, and his statements, he follows a teacher-centred approach 'it's just me who come and speak and go' and in this approach, the teacher is already expected to take the lead. Another point is the meaning associated with formative assessment for many teachers. Wiliam (2011) notion of formative assessment is that to know students' current level and the gap between it and the intended course aims and then to adapt teaching to bridge that gap and meet students' needs and thus achieve learning.

This notion seems to contradict with the practice of many teachers. The focus is merely on how students' knowledge is reflected in talk and through a nice accent. Formative assessment which is given as a TD mark is characterized by marking the current level of students, assigning a grade to it, and including it in summative assessment. The way a student can know that they are developing, can be through comparing their grades between semesters.

Wissal believes that TD marks can help silent students gain better marks. She varied her ways of assessing students formatively, she stated:

> Usually, if I know that these silent students who don't participate are listening and they are interested in the class, if I notice that the TD mark is too low, for example 10 or 11 I tend to give them some extra points because I know that they were interested in class otherwise I usually give them extra activities, if they have 12 points for the homework, I devote 4 or 5 more for another activity to recover, sometimes I use the oral test just few direct questions. But I use the tests when we are run out of time, if I know that I must submit the marks on that day or the following day I use the oral tests though I don't really like it. (Wissal. Formal Teacher Interview)

Wissal points out in this quote that formative assessment does not solely rely on students' oral participation in the classroom. She explains that it can be in the form of homework, activities and sometimes oral tests.

Israa referred commented: 'The majority of students are here for the sake of the mark, not for learning or developing their skills or getting new information or research'. (Israa. Teacher Formal Interview)

In the introduction of the thesis, I referred to the educational reform of the LMD system in Algerian universities. Among the features that this reform introduced was formative and semestrial summative assessment. In the findings of this thesis, formative assessment for teachers is assigning a grade students' participation and presence in the classroom and which is eventually included within the summative assessment results. Therefore, marks are used to assess students' performance and learning. Crosthwaite, et al (2015) argue that it may be ineffective and unfair to include participation in EFL students' assessment as it ostracises certain individuals' learning styles and preferences. In relation to silent students, grading oral participation can be problematic. Warayat (2011) mentioned in his findings that students who are silent are neglected when marks are given for students' oral participation.

Adding to the above findings, other issues related grades mentioned mainly by students are further explored in the following section.

7.2.2. Negotiating grades

When students were asked to mention an incident which may have led them to disengage from oral participation, students wrote in the diaries about how unexpected low grades made them disengage orally. Previously, I mentioned that teachers sometimes tend to provide inconsistent feedback to their students, for instance: a student is excessively corrected for small grammatical mistakes or pronunciation mistakes in a lesson which only deals with learning when to use idiomatic expressions. This inconsistency can lead to poor grading. In this subsection, students show complaints about the grades which they received in their TD marks and exams. Participants and mostly those who wrote the diary mentioned that they tend to negotiate their grades with their teachers. Teachers also mentioned that students usually come to ask for better grades. I believe that negotiating grades with teachers is beneficial because it allows the student to know their mistakes or find out which areas they need to work on more. However, students in my study claimed that grading is sometimes unfair. A student wrote:

> As we all know, in every educational sector, fairness, justice and equality should be implemented in all cases. There was a presentation that I invested all my time and effort along with my classmates to make a perfect presentation. We volunteered to present among the first ones because no one was ready yet to present, but we were. We did a really good job! We had 14/20. Other students who read from the paper and from their

phones and did a normal - average job- and they forgot words and panicked had 15 and 16! That's not fair. (Student Diary 1)

This student considered that their work was not paid off because others received better grades. Addressing the same issue, another student wrote:

I remember in the lesson of COE [Comprehensive Oral Expression] I made a presentation about an interesting topic and I put all my efforts on it, at the end I got 14, it was OK for me first since I was stressed but when I realised that one of my classmates did not do great at all, she stopped in the middle of her presentation and used her phone to read from it and she got 15, I was shocked because I did better than her and the teacher was not fair. (Student Diary 2)

These two quotes refer to students criticising the fairness of their grades and the competitive attitudes mentioned in previously in section 7.2.1. It is worthy to mention that most activities and presentations are assessed and included in the TD mark (Formative assessment). The TD mark is then included with the exam mark (Summative assessment).

Similarly, the TD mark also includes tests and quizzes, Yahya mentioned this incident when a student complained about her test mark. He said:

I remember this student whom I know since she was a little girl, she came to me complaining about her mark, she said: do I deserve 5, sir. I said: No, as a person you deserve 20 and more, but this paper deserves a 5. She was angry and thought that it was something personal maybe because no one before dared to give her below average. She even hated my module, and she was not participating, and she wasn't the only one I believe. (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

He also mentioned that many other students do the same:

Sometimes, there are some students who come to ask me to give them 9 or 10 instead of the mark I gave them, and they say: we promise you sir, we will talk in your class and we will show you that we can bring examples and discuss things, so I say now I'll keep it 5 and if I see your progress I promise I'll change it for you later. (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

This statement reveals that grades are linked to students' oral engagement and that teachers can assess students based on their oral participation. In this statement 'if I see your progress, I promise I'll change it for you later', Yahya provides clear evidence that grades are subject to

teachers' judgement about students' progress. This aligns ironically with what another student said:

'Well, honestly, I do participate, and I did not get the grades I wanted in the TD. I do not know why but I will try to do better. (maybe if I keep silent, I will get good grades)' (Student Diary 5).

I believe that students do not understand clearly how grades are assigned to students. Those who speak expect to be given better grades than those who do not. However, when having an unexpected grade, they question the teacher and their performance as well.

All the issues and idiosyncratic assessment practices mentioned above leads to raise further questions, which is how silent students are assessed in courses such as oral production? Do students have the right to ask for re-corrections? Are students allowed to choose which assessment process work best for them?

7.3. Final thoughts on assessing silent students

It obvious for some teachers that unless students speak, they receive low marks in participation which is part of the TD mark. The issue is always when teachers grow aware that these silent students are in fact students who perform well in written examinations. Teachers then can feel that these students do not deserve that low grade and tend to change it because they feel assured that those silent students are engaged in the classroom. In the following I present some of data which tackled this issue:

Yahya mentioned:

> At the end of the semester, I had this issue with some students who were among the best, but they were silent, I honestly did not know them, because they don't talk. I remember this student who was excellent, I taught her in other modules, and she got the best marks in written exams, but she didn't use to participate at all. In Oral module she didn't get a good mark. I remember a student who came to defend her, stating that she's a good student and she doesn't deserve the mark I gave to her. So I went and I asked what's the matter with her, why doesn't she participate; so she said: it's my nature, I don't speak a lot. So I said: I don't have a solution for you, if you want to get good marks, you need to speak, the module needs you to talk, because if I give a mark that doesn't reflect your actual participation it means I am cheating, however, I didn't give her below the average because I knew she was an excellent student. (Yahya. Formal Teacher Interview)

This statement is similar to that mentioned by Lina in chapter six where she said that a teacher noticed her when she had good marks in a written exam.

> In the exam, I remember, he was surprised. He went to ask other teachers about me, who is this student? And in fact, I was always sitting in the front, I was always trying to participate but for him, only his previous students are good, in a way like he has this self-confidence that only those who were taught by him have a good level while the others are not. (Lina. Formal Student Interview)

Yahya said:

> I taught many students who were excellent but silent, [*he mentioned them by name*] but if you ask me who is your favourite, I will tell it's Dalia [*pseudo name*]. The most silent student I have ever seen but she was the most intelligent and competent one. I never dared to give her a low mark because I knew how intelligent she was. (Yahya. Teacher Formal Interview)

Teachers' pre-knowledge and awareness of students' level can help both the student and teacher to achieve the desired learning outcomes. This can be met through formative assessment. Teachers thus should learn about their students, their actual level and their investment in learning in order to help them achieve what they want.

Also varying the assessment techniques can be helpful as Rosa mentioned:

> I force and oblige them, but I give them time, when I ask them and they don't answer me, I say I will give you time and comeback to you, so I turn around I pick another topic and then I come back with the same question or with something else, and in order to be fair with all my students sometimes I generally do different tests. I assess them through written tests, and through either group work or oral test, like face to face even in non-oral modules, I did it in linguistics and I got really good results. (Rosa. Teacher Formal Interview)

To conclude, assessing silent students has always been an issue for teachers who on oral engagement to assess their students. However, the above data suggest that even for teachers who were presented as severe characters showed that they take into consideration their students' investment in learning. At the moment, written exams are the only tool which teachers found useful to assess a students' actual level. Through written exams, silent students can express themselves and show their level of understanding and their engagement

with lessons. However, grades also are not a reliable source to judge students' level and engagement in learning.

7.1. Conclusion

In this chapter I believe the data has given an indication as to the extent to which assessment practices in the setting were unsystematic and problematic. It also reveals how these teachers and students struggle with concepts such as formative assessment, grading, and feedback.

The teachers' ambivalence about whether they should assess their students on their oral participation, correct language, or simply their performance in written tests have been problematised. What has also emerged, I believe, is the extent to which factors such as accents, reprimanding feedback and grades contribute to students shifting their positions between willing to participate more or choosing to shift to a silent student.

Additionally, the teachers' contradictory comments with their assessment practices as well as their authority in the classroom indicate that it may be problematic indeed to change the mentality of teachers about excessive corrective feedback, of accepting to engage other forms of participation and assessment or at the very least, acknowledging the diversity of students' learning.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion and Implications

8. Introduction

As far as literature on classroom silence exists, the findings of this study seem to reinforce existing discussions and add to it a notion of a silent student learning identity.

On a broader level, the major findings and conclusions of this thesis suggest the importance of considering students' multiple learning identities as non-fixed and that students do not exist in categories that specify them as being constrained to the behaviour they might exhibit in an event. On the contextual level, feedback and assessment practices appear to be a driving factor triggering students to be silent. These practices are also addressed from the perspective of the relationship between the learner and other individuals, notably, teachers and peers. To explain the nature of assessment and feedback in the current setting, I will explain a number of ethnographic particularities that surfaced during the data analysis.

In addition, the findings revealed strong evidence that there is a need to revise and implement professional development and training programmes for teachers as many of the pedagogical concepts and claims related to appropriate practices and modules for teaching and assessing students appear to be lacking clear pedagogical foundations.

Section 8.2 restates the specific findings of chapter 5-7. Section 8.3 and its subordinate subsections clarify the major finding about the silent student learning identity. Section 8.4 discusses specific findings related to incorporating the voice if students in guiding classroom practices. Section 8.5 discusses the assessment practices found in the setting. Section 8.6 provides implications for the study, and section 8.7 put forwards some suggestions for further research. Finally, I conclude the chapter with final thoughts in section 8.8.

8.1. Restatement of the findings

On several occasions throughout the thesis, I mentioned that the participants continually altered their arguments regarding the ways they characterised silence within the language classroom. As an inherently complex phenomenon, silence is indeed complex and difficult to describe in the sense that it could be perceived negatively as an impediment to students' language learning when characterised in relation to a position of non-oral participation in classrooms where the norms require oral engagement. At the same time, silence could also be adapted to a normalised behaviour if the silent students in the classroom become intellectually involved based on certain perceived outcomes that are measured and/or assessed by the teacher. Following the research findings, this thesis tackled various notions related to classroom participation and other context-related factors related to language learning in an EFL setting.

In this section, I briefly recapitulate how the participants' statements discussed in Chapters 5–7 are related to the complexity of silence in the language classroom. I mainly focus on the factors that the participants regarded as particularly significant in their explanations of silence in the classroom. Importantly, I explain the different learning positions the students adopted in explaining their silence and how the classroom regime affected these positions.

This thesis covered how students engage and perceive their engagement in the classroom through multiple models that did not necessarily consider oral participation. As per the discussion provided in section 5.2, students considered lesson content and its relevance as factors determinant of their oral engagement in the sense that content was sometimes regarded as shallow compared to their own perception of their language level. For instance, the participants constantly referred to lesson contents that were boring, uninteresting or naïve. This raises two important points for consideration: First, the students did not connect affectively to such lessons and thus reported they were orally disengaged or silent. Second, such content was either institutionalised or generated by the teacher, with students' interests and voices poorly regarded during lesson planning

The complexity of silence was highlighted by the fact that the silent students sometimes chose to break prolonged periods of silence to allow the teacher to proceed with the lessons. To this end, silent students per se were able to express intolerance towards silence when they felt that it was affecting the quality of their learning. The experience I had with a group of students can be summarised through four key factors to help encourage student participation: making the content relevant to the students, connecting the content to personal experiences,

delivering the content in an open-ended manner and shifting the teacher's role from controller to facilitator (details on these are mentioned in section 5.1.1). Accordingly, it can be argued that the relevance of content for students affects their cognitive engagement in lessons but does not determine whether they will speak or not.

In section 5.2, I identified that silent students had flexible self-concepts and discovered that students who voluntarily engaged in the study as silent began to negotiate their self-perceptions and reflect on different learning identities and positions. For the most part, the students participants began negotiating their silent self-identities with reference to some of the experiences and differences they had and could recognise in a non-formal learning environment called CEIL. As discussed in section 5.2.1, the participants highlighted three main differences between formal and non-formal classroom environments: the role of the teacher, the language proficiency level of the students and the time and content dedicated to student practice. These three elements or factors were in fact mentioned repeatedly by the students, even those who did not attend CEIL classes. The role and behaviour of the teacher in the classroom accounted for the largest share of the students' explanations regarding their silence.

Apparently, the students also evaluated their teachers' behaviour in the classroom. I examined in detail some of the perceptions of the students regarding their teachers, who they claimed were the reason for their silence. The behaviours described in section 5.3 were based on certain experiences students mentioned of being neglected or ignored by teachers who did not provide them opportunities to participate. Such experiences eventually led them to avoid oral participation. Some students also mentioned being traumatised by primary school teachers or mocked by secondary school teachers for their accents and use of the English language. Discussing teachers' behaviour led them to discuss favouritism, by which they meant teachers' overt appraisal of some students. In most cases, favouritism was related to an observed investment in learning through continuous oral engagement and/or achievement. The idea of favouritism was also highlighted by some teachers, although their discussions did not include mention of the students who participated frequently. In fact, a number of teachers referred to certain silent students as their favourites, mainly because they understood these students' language level and commitment to learning. Thus, silence did not seem to be a significant issue for some teachers as long as students could prove their engagement in learning through their competence and achievements.

In discussing the idea of student competence and achievements, another important factor came to the surface, namely, how students perceive themselves and their academic ability as well as the meta-perceptions. The complexity and incongruity of students' self-perceptions, academic ability perceptions and meta-perceptions were salient aspects of the way students expressed different learning identities. For instance, Lina explained her experience with silence in her first year at university as being based on her perceived lack of ability to speak like her teacher, who she perceived as very competent (see sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2). Lina confirmed that her language abilities and communication skills had developed since then, although she was still silent. She then modified her statement to include the claim that she would only participate if she was sure about the answer. Other statements revealed inconsistencies between students' actual abilities and their perceptions of their abilities. This theme is related to certain psychological factors, such as embarrassment, self-image and personality traits, among others.

The psychological aspect of student silence has been discussed widely in the literature. In the interviews in the current study, it was mentioned more often by teachers than by students. As outlined in section 5.6, the participants (mainly the teachers) sought to explain the silence of students through psychological variables, such as introversion, shyness and other personality traits. Their conflicting views were again revealed as to whether those students who did not participate and were silent were cognitively engaged (they may receive good grades in written tasks) or whether learning was reflected in oral discussion, meaning students should talk to be perceived as cognitively engaged. Importantly, the teachers appeared to narrowly categorise their students as either silent or talkative, engaged or disengaged, and active or passive. For instance, Rosa said she would describe any of her silent students as absent-minded because she could determine whether they were engaged or not, while Wissal explained that there are forms of engagement other than speaking. Yahya expressed both views, arguing that students can learn silently (based on his own experience as a silent student) while also sharing his annoyance with having students who do not participate, which he linked to their lack of understanding or incompetence.

Much of the discussion in this thesis focused on silence in relation to classroom participation, and Chapter 6 provided a detailed account of the different forms of and preferences regarding participation patterns. Since the student participants repeatedly claimed that they were not always silent and that their learning environment, teachers and psychological state also

played role in their behaviour, it seemed important to discuss the moments they felt at ease to orally participate in their classes.

Actually, the desired participation patterns were in many statements referred to as being teacher-led, structured or teacher-controlled, as described in section 6.2. In other words, a large number of participants expressed views that seemed to feed into what is pedagogically referred to as teacher-centredness. The practices linked to teacher-centredness can be traced back to deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning that the participants brought with them to the classroom. Teacher-centredness is in this sense a professional way of thinking and position widely accepted by students and teachers. Leading classroom discussions, allocating roles and making sure there is order in the classroom were among the characterisations given by teachers who described themselves as adopting a teacher-centred approach. Experiences such as that of Wissal, who interfered to stop a classroom discussion when she felt left out because her students were taking control in a debate without including her, reflect the way a teacher might respond to a lack of control (see section 6.2.1). Practices such as structured participation patterns, hand-raising before talking, following a list of names for an order participation and speaking one-by-one following the seating order were recognised among the preferred methods for oral participation by some of the students, as described in section 6.2.2.

Interestingly, talking about these student preferences allowed me to discover that students feel safe in environments that promote equal opportunities for participation. Despite the fact that these forms of participation appear structured and inflexible, they appeared to facilitate the participation of silent students, who felt themselves orally included in classroom tasks. In particular, the silent students' positions or learning identities would adapt to the tasks required when the pattern of participation was structured and when the students appeared to have no choice in the matter. There did not seem to be any resistance to such participation patterns; in fact, they were praised by certain students.

Similar to these participation preferences, group work activities were said to take up an important chunk of classroom time. While teachers still adopted the notion of teacher-centredness in terms of leading and controlling group work activities, students expressed a puzzling view regarding engagement in group work. In particular, they expressed a preference for pair work and a desire for less control and intrusion from teachers. Section 6.3 dealt with how the participants viewed group work activities. Notions of informal group

work, according to which students work together without the pressure of producing something for assessment, were discussed in section 6.3.1, while formal group work, according to which the activity is assessed through a determined product, was dealt with in section 6.3.2. In discussing group work, the silent students provided immense knowledge and details on the associated processes. Their experiences with group work activities also reflected a self-assessor learning identity as they were able to depict which groups, members and activities could make them benefit from such engagement.

By the end of Chapter 6, it seemed important to refer again to how the participants viewed oral participation and speaking in the language classroom. Therefore, section 6.3 discussed the professional views of teachers regarding speaking and silence and outlined how some of the students exhibited a shift in their positions, expressing eagerness to align with a normative learning identity. For this normative learning identity, it seemed important that the student should know when to speak and participate when needed and achieve good grades in written and oral tasks.

One important theme persistent throughout the data collection and analysis was assessment. In Chapter 7, assessment in the classroom setting was thoroughly discussed. Three main issues were raised in relation to oral corrective feedback, formative assessment and grading, respectively. This added to the many areas where the students and teachers appeared to disagree. Almost all participants, for instance, stated that corrections should be done with consideration. However, it was clear from the students' interviews, observation notes and even the teachers' interviews that little consideration was often given to the situation, timing, task goals and student psychology. Despite the fact that the teachers suggested oral correction would only be used to repair communication breakdowns and that they allowed students to speak without stopping them, the observational data contradicted this reality, and students were often reprimanded for their use of tenses, accents or sometimes simply sharing their opinions. Furthermore, the grading process appeared relatively unstructured, and no clear approach was outlined by the teachers. For instance, a teacher would state that only students who participated orally would be given grades above average and then contradict this with another statement that even silent students who were known to be excellent could be given a grade above average. This inconsistency appeared to affect the way the students viewed their learning and how they perceived the credibility of their grades.

8.2. Elaborating on the key findings and implications

In my view, the above findings indicate that factors in several interconnected areas related to student silence in the language classrooms may require us to re-evaluate our perceptions, judgements and approaches for dealing with this complex phenomenon. In this section, I discuss what I deem to be the most important conclusions drawn from the findings of this thesis. The conclusions discussed in this section were developed from the general findings and are summarised in relation to three key points: the silent learner identity, student voices in guiding classroom practices and assessment practices in the context of the study.

8.2.1. Learning identities and the silent learner identity

The key findings of this study support previous research on students' multiple learning identities in language learning settings (e.g. Norton, 1995, 2000, 2010, 2013; Block, 2007; Zekri, 2019; Ziad, 2021) and suggest that students who are silent can also have multiple learning identities, with the silent learner identity being one of them. This study did not intend to focus on learning identities in particular, but at the later stages of the thesis writing, I was able to make sense of how the participants embodied multiple learning identities and that being silent could indeed be regarded as a learning identity, or, as I shall call it, the silent learner identity. This identity was prominent for many students and regarded as a personality trait by many teachers. However, there were instances in which it was negotiated, accepted and/or rejected by participants, indicating it can exist alongside many other learning identities in students who are considered silent.

As the participants discussed their experiences and some of the classroom incidents, they had been through during their teaching and learning careers, students began to negotiate their roles and positions and redefine their silence based on the learning environment circumstances, including what the teacher expected from them, the way the lesson was delivered, whether the oral participation was graded and other similar particularities. Similarly, the teachers continuously altered their perceptions of silent students. Throughout this process, the participants (mainly the teachers) would elaborate on a set of beliefs that featured an ideal EFL student. Eventually, a normative identity characterising an ideal EFL student came to the surface. These findings supported the claim that students aspired to align with this normative identity, and many teachers praised those who they perceived to conform to it. The issue is that this normative identity also had to align with classroom regime/norms. The latter in some cases seemed similar to 'normative identity' suggested by Cobb, et al (2009) which sets standards for competence and obligations for performance that ascribe to

the effective student and that participation and students' agency are consistent with the obligations of a classroom. Teachers also expressed their aspiration to have talkative students who respect the classroom regime.

The notion of normative identity has been used in mathematics classes, but I find it of relevance to my study as explains that a normative identity can set obligations and expectations based on the nature of the classroom. Therefore, as this research provide ethnographical details on the nature of some EFL classes in a higher education context in Algeria, this can be helpful to analyse other similar contexts to understand how learners' identities are developing depending on the nature of classroom cultures and how students maintain agency to resist obligations such as excessive demands of oral participation in language classes.

In referring to their learning identities, the students unknowingly used multiple 'voices' or 'I positions' (Bakhtin, 1986) to provide a sense of the different learning identities and participation preferences they exhibited in different learning environments. They mentioned learning experiences and memories from their past, through which they explained their present behaviour and then shared aspirations for the future. Each of these positions was associated with a learning identity, and sometimes more than one when referring to a single event. For instance, Sanaa's experience was remarkable in that her transitions between her silent learner and other learning identities were clear. Her first experience in primary school with a teacher who 'bullied' her resulted in her 'being silent since then' (Sanaa). In talking about her current state, she still referred to herself as silent but expressed that she also took other positions, such as leading formal group work and engaging in public talk forums and university clubs. Despite her reference to these new learning positions she had adopted at university, she did not refer to any of them as identities or view them as different forms of comportment. In other words, she remained certain in representing herself as a silent student except when mentioning her experiences in informal learning environments, such as CEIL classes. In these cases, she began using statements such as 'opened up to speaking in class' and 'no longer silent'.

All the students who participated in the study exhibited this repositioning in their stories. However, statements such as 'I am silent' and 'I am not silent' were not altered in a clear manner. In fact, whenever the students mentioned situations in which they were not silent and exhibited other learning identities that included oral engagement, it was clear that they

184

were unknowingly negotiating their silent learner identities using alternative constructs. For example, Anne said, 'I dare say I have the courage to go up there (the front of the classroom) and speak' (Anne), and Rima mentioned, 'when they don't find the answer, I feel obliged to speak in order to move on to something else' (Rima).

This repositioning also went the other way. For instance, Linda focused on her transition from being a talkative student to a silent student as a result of her negative experience with a teacher.

Additionally, the present study revealed a common assumption in the field that students have a single fixed identity. For instance, Rima said, 'people think I am silent, therefore I am', while many teachers made statements, such as 'they are introverts', 'they are shy', 'it's their personality' and 'I feel guilty for forcing them to speak because this is who they are; it's their personality'. This set of beliefs could only be negotiated when the teachers mentioned the silent students' successes and achievements. In the following section, I elaborate on how perceived achievement is related to the way silent learners are perceived.

8.2.2. The silent learner identity and its relationship to perceived achievement

The students in this study consistently negotiated their identities as silent students with regard to their achievements in the classroom as well as through 'attribution retaining' (Ryan and Irie, 2014), according to which they engaged in explaining their stories and reconsidering their successes and failures. The notion of a silent learner identity did not have specific attributes that were either positive or negative but was used to explain certain stories of success and failure.

When students explained that they had undergone an experience of being silent in certain courses and then paused to re-explain their experience based on the success they had achieved, it was evident that they were negotiating their positions and re-explaining the situation by either adopting or rejecting the silent learner identity. It was at first rejected, when these students referred to their successful experiences in the classroom achieving good grades and to feeling more capable of speaking. One example was Lina, who explained how the teacher noticed her after she achieved good grades on an exam, stating, 'a teacher came to us and asked why we don't speak'. Afterwards, she began perceiving herself as more competent in the language, stating, 'now, I speak a lot, not because of maturity but because

I found myself more capable of the language' (Lina). In these two incidents, she did not consider herself silent because there was a success story attached to her overall narration. Then, in the same interview, Lina contradicted herself, saying, 'even though I know all the answers, I still don't speak. I don't have this motive anymore to raise my hand and say the answer'. Similarly, Sanaa and Wissam detached themselves from their silent learner identity when they achieved a C1 in the CEIL course. They then began renegotiating their perception of being silent, which can be attributed to the fact that they were more confident in using the language. At the same time, these students were also observed as being silent during many sessions and still referred to themselves as silent.

Additionally, some students reported achieving good grades through written exams and that not participating did not affect their grades at all, such as in the cases of Sanaa, Lina and Wafaa. Here, the adoption of the silent learner identity was not biased by the negative connotations of silence. The students who wrote diaries also mentioned that participating in the classroom did not guarantee receiving good grades. One student stated: 'I decided to be silent; maybe this way I will have good grades'.

On the contrary, students would mostly adopt the silent learner identity when referring to negative experiences, such as those described by Linda and Anne, who were silent in classrooms where the teacher was perceived as having a threatening character. To this extent, the students were unaware of their multiple interacting learning identities, and the adoption or rejection of the silent learner identity was unconsciously linked to the contextual factors related to an experience.

However, continuous reference to grades and the results of written exams was consistent when discussing silence as an issue. While the teachers clearly stated their intolerance of classroom silence and dislike towards silent students, they also expressed contradicting views on the idea of whether a silent student could achieve good grades or whether a certain silent student was known to be smart. The more tolerant positions on classroom silence appeared to stem from success stories of specific silent students.

To elaborate on this point, the teachers' arguments at first stemmed from widespread narratives regarding appropriate learning in English language classes, which advocate for oral engagement, stating that participation is necessary as the way through which students are perceived as engaging and learning. However, in referring to specific silent students who were known for being successful, high-achieving and smart, the teachers appeared to tolerate

the silent learner identity and consider it as a form of learning and engagement measured through good results in written assessments, exams and grades. Additionally, when silence was mentioned without reference to certain students in particular, it appeared to be appreciated on the basis that it reflected respect to the classroom regime and the teacher, who is an authority figure and considered the leader of the classroom.

8.3. Student voices in guiding classroom practices

In this section, I discuss the importance of student voices in managing and guiding classroom practices and research. I set forward the main conclusions I assume contributed to understanding learning environments for students, which in turn lead to the conclusion that students practise their learning and agency through multiple learning identities. Recent work supported by the Gates Foundation Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project notes the following:

> No one has a bigger stake in teaching effectiveness than students. Nor are there any better experts on how teaching is experienced by its intended beneficiaries. But only recently have many policymakers and practitioners come to recognize that – when asked the right questions, in the right ways – students can be an important source of information on the quality of teaching and the learning environment in individual classrooms. (MET Project, 2012, p. 2)

Furthermore, Howard and Donaghue (2015) argue that, in addition to teacher and observer voices, learner voices and input can add value to the evaluation of teachers (p. 207).

Similarly, students' voices and narratives are crucial in constructing their learning identities as well as key factors in revealing particularities in classroom practices that are difficult for teachers to identify. My findings support this claim as most of the teachers' perceptions regarding student silence were shallow (as previously discussed in section 5.6). Additionally, many of the beliefs the teachers espoused on teaching and the position they held within the classrooms contrasted with those of the students. This was likely caused by status inadequacies and a lack of or poor communication between teachers and students. In the following sections, I will discuss interpersonal relationships and grade-driven assessments, which were two of the major factors discussed in the finding chapters by students and were considered important when discussing learning identities.

8.3.1. Interpersonal relationships

Among the most salient factors that aligned with the adoption or rejection of a silent learner identity in the considered setting was the perception of interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. In this section, I refer to a perceived teacher-centredness that dominated the perspectives on teaching and what seemed to be an authoritarian relationship. These two elements affected the rapport between students and teachers in terms of interactions and obligations that are part of classroom practices. I also explain the factor of peer dynamics, which I believe requires further investigation from a sociocultural perspective.

- **Authoritarian classrooms**

The authoritarian classroom, authoritarian teacher and authoritative discourse appeared to be factors related to the classroom setting and to reflect some of the sociocultural beliefs the participants endorsed while engaged in the study. These beliefs included the perceived roles of individuals and their expected comportments, including the dynamics between teachers and students and between elders and youngsters. In the literature review in section 2.4, it was mentioned that speaking and participation tend to be monitored by the teacher and that teachers are often seen as authoritative figures in the same way as *Elcheikh* or *Kutab* in Quranic schools. This thesis supports this finding, and some of the silent students held such beliefs, including Anne, for example:

> My thinking is still growing. People who are older than me are experienced, and they know more than what I do. They are wise, so when I sit with them, I'm afraid that they are talking about mature things and that I might say something that sounds childish. I feel like my mind is small compared to them. It's the same thing in the classroom. I can't just talk to some teachers because I may sound foolish. (Anne, Formal Interview)

Nour shared a similar view:

> When I am sitting with people older than me, I feel like it's a shame to be spontaneous around them. There are boundaries in interaction for a reason. Speaking freely around someone older than me means than I am disrespectful. Even now in front of you [*referring to me*], I can't be fully myself because you are older than me and I am still a student. (Nour, Formal Interview)

Fedj and Bouhass-Benaissi (2018) claim that the community, family and social conventions are involved in the personal life of the Algerian individual and are then reflected in students' approach to learning. In particular, they state: 'students often find it embarrassing to question the content of their learning or to discuss the knowledge conveyed by their superiors.

Likewise, students' intellectual disagreement and detection of what is right or wrong is sometimes seen as challenge and effrontery' (p. 454). These beliefs can be brought to the classroom by students or developed and reinforced when teachers, as the individuals in control, share the same mindset. This was the case for Yahya, who mentioned, 'I am the one responsible for order in the classroom. I select who speaks and ensure silence' (Yahya).

Authoritarian behaviour can encompass authoritarian discourse. The findings mentioned in sections 6.2 and 6.3.2. align with the studies of Nystrand (1997); Mortimer and Scott (2003); and Scott, Mortimer and Aguiar (2006), who all refer authoritative discourse in the classroom. The authoritative discourse is typically characterised by a dominance of 'test questions' that the teacher already knows the answer to, usually includes explicit teacher evaluations of students' contributions and is often initiated through a teacher initiation–student response–teacher evaluation pattern.

Yahya was remarkable as a teacher participant in the study as he appeared to share his views and opinions without a filter. He marked the role of the teacher as an authoritarian figure who is expected to lead and control the behaviour of students. Many other participants, including students as well as teachers, also claimed that the role of the teacher was to maintain tight control over the classroom discussion while being positioned as the primary source of knowledge. This was exemplified by Anne, who said, 'he is the teacher; he is supposed to know everything', and by Wissal, who ended a classroom discussion when she felt that she was no longer in control.

Many students explained that they did not correct or question teachers' lesson content because it would be perceived as an offense. Sanaa said:

> There are some teachers who are really severe and 'professional'. I don't think they need to be that severe to show that they are important…I think even teachers do commit mistakes, and I think it's fine because we are lifelong learners, but they consider it as an assault or offense. I myself tend not to correct teachers, because I tried once, and they saw it as an offense. (Sanaa)

The findings thus revealed that students were reprimanded for asking further questions or bringing topics to the classroom that were not included in the lessoncontent. In section 5.1, the students also expressed that they found the content of lessons demotivating. They further explained in section 5.2.1 that the status of the teacher and the nature of the content delivered in informal learning environments encouraged them to adopt different learning positions

according to which they felt encouraged to speak and interact with the teacher and their peers without fear of embarrassment.

Pulverness (2021) observed and interviewed groups of Algerian students over the course of three years and found that they were enthusiastic and keen to learn and practice English through engaging in activities outside the constraints of the classrooms. He states:

> When asked which English lessons they liked the most, to our surprise they mentioned writing activities, the reason being that these were the only occasions where they had the opportunity to express their personal ideas and opinions. Their energy and enthusiasm for English as a real-world means of communication is in marked contrast to the majority of lessons that we have observed, where students were almost totally constrained by the limits of highly controlled practice and given little or no creative opportunity to develop their language skills. (p. 41)

What is most important from this section is to explain how these learners' identities are impacted by the sociocultural elements that led many of them to be silent. I believe that the imbalance between out-of-classroom experiences and in-classroom experiences agitate the learners' identities. On the one hand, students are exercising their agency and set up ambitions for learning and becoming; on the other hand, they cannot fully maintain the same position in the classroom as it is constrained in terms of participation, content and teacher–student relationship.

Here, I refer to an anecdote from my data collection with a professor and former teacher who asked me to explain the notions of qualitative research and ethnography. As I explained, he continued by asking me what my measurement variables were. I answered that I did not have variables as they would emerge later during the data analysis, and I would refer to them as categories. He commented, 'you cannot start research without having clear variables. Come to me after a couple of years, maybe you will be able to explain it better' (Researcher Diary). This incident left an impression on me because, in that moment, I perceived myself as a researcher explaining my research to a researcher. His answer to my explanation positioned me as an amateur researcher or maybe as a student with no status. See section 4.5

Marking differences in status is a common occurrence, and therefore, students' positions are constructed based on these differences. Listening to how students perceive these status and power relations is of paramount importance for creating safe and productive learning environments. Most students in the current study made a statement as to how they would

like their teachers to act. The following statements were taken from the formal interviews with students. As Anne stated:

> I want the teacher to treat us, the students, in an equal way. I don't want to feel that he/she has favourites. We are here all the same for the sake of knowledge. Being rich, names, power, regions should stay out, and when they correct our mistakes, they should take it easy. Don't yell. I don't want to feel harmed or hurt or ashamed. (Anne)

Similarly, Wissam said:

> I want teachers to make it easy for us, especially language learners. It's really hard to speak a language perfectly, especially if it's not well-used outside the walls of university… sometimes I accept getting out of a session without understanding a single word, and I don't ask the teacher about the things that I did not understand. What's important for me is to not get embarrassed. (Wissam)

As argued earlier, a silent learner identity is the result of a number of interacting factors in the learning environment. Power distance between students and teachers is one salient factor that leads students to be reticent and adopt a silent identity.

- **Peer relationships**

Another important factor related to the impact of interpersonal relationships on students' oral engagement and the atmosphere of the classroom environment is peer relations. The interpersonal aspect in the construction of participation dynamics was found mainly to be salient in group work activities. As seen in section 6.3, students favoured working with friends instead of students who were considered as being outside of their friendship circles. According to most students, this enabled them to be productive and avoid conflicts over leadership and dependency. Students claimed that they were not used to working in groups in pre-tertiary education. Therefore, such a practice was considered uncomfortable by many. A study in Algeria on final year secondary school teachers' practices regarding the use of group works, Baghoussi & El Ouchdi (2019) conclude that:

> All the informants rarely encourage their students to work in groups… teachers do not give priority to group work. They claim that they avoid asking their students to work collaboratively because of the classroom settings (space deficiency and the large number of tables/chairs) and the noise such strategy engenders, especially in overcrowded classes. (p. 280)

The findings of this thesis suggest that when students were obliged to work in groups, many resorted to silence and oral disengagement. Additionally, many students were observed to withdraw from their assigned roles.

Such issues in peer interpersonal relationships can be traced to the notion of competitiveness between students and negative prior learning experiences especially those including bullying and mockery. Baghoussi (2021) study in an Algerian setting stated the following: 'instead of encouraging collaboration and cooperation, teachers prefer motivating students extrinsically through grades, rewards, and teacher-ignited competitiveness that produce short-term effects on students' (p. 276).

These behaviours are brought to university classrooms by students and impact their current learning performances. The findings suggest that the students were aware of some of the practices that led to their current learning difficulties. Students mentioned in their diaries when asked if they have the power to change something in their classroom, their aspirations for classrooms where all students respect each other and do not make fun of their peers' accents or language. See section 7.1.4

Overall, interpersonal relationships and power dynamics were found to be important factors influencing the maintenance of silent positions in classroom interactions and to limit and, on occasion, silence students' voices in educational settings. Listening to students and taking their perceptions into account can help maintain positive classroom atmosphere and encourage positive relationships.

The perception of assessments in classrooms was another salient factor mentioned mostly by students, as discussed in the following section.

8.4. Assessments in the setting

Assessment practices were found to have an immense impact on students who chose to be silent and were also shown to be associated with an unclear approach among teachers. The present assessment system within the setting or the absence of a system fostered competitive attitudes and measured student performance according to idiosyncratic standards. Hiouani (2020) found in her study about ideologies and positions in an Algerian higher education setting that:

> Students were habitually compared to an idealised image of the 'native speaker' and
> 'Western' student. This idealised image often engendered issues such as assuming that

the students' competency levels correlated with their performance compared to 'native speaker' and 'Western' students in the sense that, in some instances, the teachers would set an ideal that students would only get near obtaining if their answers or performance matched that which was already set according to imagined 'native speaker' and 'Western' standards. (p.232)

This was clear in the way some teachers as well as students judged the accent of their students and peers and tried to correct the pronunciation of certain words repeatedly especially those pronounced in French way.

This also aligns with the normative identity which teacher set and try to compare the performance of a student with that idealised image of how a student is expected to perform.

In previous chapters (most notably Chapter 7), I noted that assessment was found to be highly summative in the current setting. As suggested by Boumediene and Hamzaoui (2017), 'the assessment found in the Algerian EFL classroom is of a summative nature' (p. 172). Formative assessment was rarely provided to students, and, in most cases, it was confused with oral corrective feedback. Additionally, Hanifi (2014) research in some of the Algerian universities found that teacher's correction provided no feedback beside the given grade, and the questions are usually memory testing instead of knowledge exploring. A student in the same study insisted that the teacher should give more importance to tell the students about their real mistakes and help do some self-correction in order not to commit the same mistakes again and it is only by doing so that the grades can have a certain value. The grading process was found to be highly subjective, especially in oral sessions and modules where the teachers provided extra marks for participation. Peer feedback was perceived negatively and associated with negative intentions, such as mockery and embarrassment.

The findings of this thesis suggest that these assessment practices were the result of poor teacher training and a lack of ongoing teacher education, as discussed in Chapter 6. This study did not intend to investigate teacher professionalism or evaluate teacher familiarisation with theoretical and practical concepts widely used in the education sector. However, as important findings and suggestions, it was revealed that teachers should have an understanding of the importance of peer feedback and that assessment should be for learning rather than of learning (Black and William, 2003, 2009).

8.5. Implications of the study

The current study suggests that the silence of the students observed in the EFL classrooms resulted from a set of psychological, socio-cultural and pedagogical factors. The shared element among most of these factors was the role played by the teacher. In line with this, the previous sections summarised the findings of this study by discussing the main conclusions to be drawn from it while offering insight into the students' silence and silent students learning identities. However, this section states the implications of these findings on teachers, students, and curriculum designers. To note, there was a tendency among participants to refer to an entrenched beliefs and attachment to the teacher-centred approach. I do not believe that a complete shift will be possible in the setting, so I will not recommend the adoption of a learner-centred approach.

My perceptions of the approaches to teaching and learning in the researched EFL setting can be summarised by the following points:

Idiosyncratic teaching approaches: educators consider their teaching approach to be a product of their early professional experiences and/or their learning experiences. They attribute their unawareness of many complex aspects of teaching to a lack of training and professional development courses.

Many teachers seem to do their best in the setting. Adopting a teacher-centred approach did not always lead to teachers' controlling their classrooms while ignoring or disregarding the thoughts and perspectives of their students. However, there were still not many opportunities for this aspect of education to flourish and there seem to be no opportunities for discussing this with the teachers' themselves.

Student preference for teacher-directed learning: many students seemed to prefer being directed and guided by their teachers. Students expect more freedom in terms of their choice of lesson content, as well as increased opportunities for classroom participation; however, their need for an authority figure was clear. In this sense, their learning preferences appear to be a result of the teaching methods they became accustomed to during their pre-tertiary education and socio-cultural beliefs that give a teacher the status of a source of knowledge.

Lecture-style teaching: this method is a result of the hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the student mentioned in the previous point. Teachers who use a lecturing style can impart large amounts of sequential information and lexical-grammatical points; however, this style leads some students to become disinterested in the course material and limit their opportunities to orally engage in lesson.

To this end, I believe in adopting whatever approach that is suitable for the learning situation, the setting and the course that facilitates the accommodation of the different needs of students and teachers. This thesis suggests several practical implications which are not only related to silence and non-oral participation but to the teaching of languages in the context of this study and similar environments. As the current research does not exclusively focus on specific strategies for dealing with classroom silence, the pedagogical suggestions I present here are made tentatively.

8.5.1. Implications for teachers

From this study, teachers can learn about silent students in the context of the study, but the findings can also be helpful to understand the nature of other educational environments, not necessarily related to language learning.

First, teachers should be aware that a student's silence is not necessarily an indication of incompetence: silent students can be just as engaged as talkative students. A teacher's role is to determine students' preferred form of participation and whether they are intimidated by the idea of speaking in class.

At the beginning of the semester, teachers should highlight what they perceive as 'active learning' or 'active engagement' and remind students of the expectations and requirements of the course regularly. Setting those expectations clearly allow students to know what is expected of them and allow them to negotiate those expectations, therefore, facilitating discussions between teachers and students can help determine both parties' expectations. These discussions can take place either in-person or on a virtual platform. Some attendees of my IATEFL 2021 conference presentation suggested that these discussions were easier when conducted virtually, their students could share their thoughts openly and experienced less anxiety. Also, some attendees suggested a shoulder-to-shoulder type of discussion with their silent students. According to them, this lowered their fear of eye contact and facilitated the interaction for students.

Knowledge of the factors that can influence students to become silent learners or adopt a silent learning identity can help an educator to find or develop the suitable approach of teaching and assessing a silent student.

Secondly, in the literature I mentioned that silent students are perceived to be lacking interest in learning. This study also concluded that some of the silent students have a lack of interest

in the course or the content of lessons. This lack of interest which led to their silence is resulted from their expectations not being met. Therefore, teachers should include their students' expectations when planning their lessons.

Furthermore, a teacher will find that an awareness of the nature of a student's silence can be helpful in several areas: Students who wish to be more talkative can be assisted in breaking their silence, and when they prefer to remain silent; other methods of learning and participation, like silent engagement, can be facilitated. In addition, it is important to know both the shared factors in a classroom and the individual-specific factors. For example, fear of negative feedback and fear of having low grades were all shared factors among the participants leading them to resort to silence.

Other implications emerging from the findings of chapters six and seven include:

- Teachers should consider students' prior learning experiences and participation preferences and adjust their teaching assessment methods accordingly.
- Implementing a face-to-face testing strategy for oral exams in a secure environment instead of in front of others.
- Asking silent students to provide written summaries of lessons to ensure they have engaged in their classes. A teacher mentioned that some of her students exercised their agency through bringing written summaries of lessons which she considered a form of participation.
- Allowing students to choose their roles in group work activities and permitting them to choose the members of their groups, and when appropriate, give the student the option to work alone.
- Encourage students to form study groups outside the classroom.
- Allowing for a period of reflection before asking students to talk.
- Avoiding giving reprimanding feedback which harms the students' willingness to talk.
- Using anonymous technology applications and software, such as Mentimeter software, which allows answers/opinions to be shared anonymously and then used as the topic for a discussion.
- Minimising the lecturing style in favour of a discussion-based style such as asking questions that invite participation with a broad range of personal lived experiences.

- Avoiding grading techniques for oral contributions – they can encourage some students, but silent students can find them demotivating. Instead, teachers should encourage students through ipsative feedback which highlights learners' achievements over time, rather than what is lacking in a performance (Hughes, 2014, p. 99)

Teachers are also encouraged to familiarise themselves with the different learning identities of their students and remain aware that, despite their lack of verbal contributions, silent students do participate in many other ways when given the opportunity.

8.5.2. Implications for curriculum designers

The findings can be used to make important decisions on curriculum content. The study showed that there was a lack of awareness among participants about the aims and importance of certain lessons and course content. Many students considered the lessons to be below their academic level or not in-line with their interests as language learners, while some were unable to connect effectively with them at all.

Curriculum designers can integrate the voices and views of students when creating course content. Teachers are also given the opportunity to design their lessons and the freedom to decide how they should be presented to students. Therefore, teachers acting as curriculum designers can benefit from allowing students to share their opinions on course content, discussing unclear objectives and suggesting ways that students can integrate their interests into the content.

8.5.3. Implications for students

As far as students are concerned, I believe that they should be aware of the nature of their silence, be it psychological, pedagogical, or other. Because their silence was multifaceted, the students in this study who withdrew from verbal participation seemed to struggle to identify its cause sometimes: it was beneficial to their learning at times, but it also affected their self-image and their perception of their academic competence. Also, being aware of the multiplicity of learning identities can help students better understand their roles and positions in the classroom setting and beyond. The following recommendations are considered as final thoughts derived from my experiences with the silent students in the field:

- Reflective journals for students to write down their feelings about incidents or experiences in the classroom to make them more aware of the nature of their decisions when choosing to remain silent or to verbally engage.
- Students approaching teachers and explaining their preferred form of participation or their concerns regarding oral engagement and assessments.
- Encouraging silent students to engage in extra-curricular activities, such as language clubs and forums: many participants were able to reconstruct their learning identity by engaging in activities outside of the classroom.
- Developing a self-assessment identity that allows a student to measure their progress and identify their weaknesses and establish a plan to reach to their desired goals.

8.6. Recommendations for further research

To expand upon the findings of this study and that of the current research, several areas within the same context are worthy of further exploration:

a. Focusing on students' learning identities in EFL classes, and the ways students engage in learning especially on those of silent students or students who exhibit other forms of engagement.

In alignment with the body of literature, this study also suggests a multiplicity of student learning identities while introducing the concept of the silent learner identity. A review of the literature revealed that previous research on silence in educational setting had been predominantly focused on psychological and cultural factors. A limitation of these studies was categorising students as either silent or talkative – a student can certainly be both. To my knowledge, none of these studies examined the notion of flexible self-concept in relation to silent students. Also, the viewpoints of both teachers and students were rarely taken into account simultaneously, as previous research predominantly focused on either teachers or students. As a suggestion for future research: gathering the opinions of peers in regard to their classmates' silence could add immense knowledge to the body of literature.

On occasions when both teachers and students were included in this study, the discourse on their conceptions of silence and engagement was revealed and seemed conflicted. Therefore, conducting further research inclusive of both teachers and students would be beneficial to understanding the different learning identities of pupils within different environments. In addition, it would allow for an exploration of whether teachers' perceptions and strategies

adapt as learner identities shift and how these possible changes manifest. Expanding the study would also allow for further unidentified pedagogies of engagement to emerge, should they exist.

Therefore, to what extent teachers are aware of the diversity of their students' learning identities as well as their own identities when dealing with silent students are topics, I am curious to explore. Also, to examine their strategies in-depth, I would like to further research how students with a dominant silent identity navigate their learning with minimal oral participation.

b. Investigating in-depth the practices of teachers in Algerian EFL higher education contexts.

In this thesis, the findings reinforce those of Borg (2003, 2015) on the matter of teachers' perceptions and practices: teachers use their previous experiences to make decisions on their use of techniques and approaches. Many of these practices, such as their methods of delivering feedback and responding to errors or how they perceived education in general, seemed entrenched in their belief systems.

My findings revealed that many teachers report a lack of teacher training and make reference to 'spontaneous' teaching: an approach based on personal reflection on content in the curriculum and the way it is delivered situations. I would be interested in studying the level of awareness that teachers possess regarding their professional development throughout their careers: how they conduct their reflective practices and whether they consider themselves in continuous professional development as teachers/researchers or not.

c. Further research on assessment practices within EFL language learning contexts

The salient role of assessments in students adopting a silent learner identity suggests a need to examine teachers' practice. Assessments were sometimes performed unconsciously due to their importance in the normative identity that teachers expect students to have. Therefore, knowing how these assessments work and how they are used is valuable for student learning and curriculum designers.

8.6. Limitations

A number of limitations should be considered. As mentioned in Section 4.2.1, my engagement time in the fieldwork was limited due to presidential elections and winter holidays. Soon after that there was the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of my focused-ethnography study does not consider this a problem itself; however, I believe that I could

have yielded more data if I had the chance to stay more in the field. In my last visit to the university, I led the oral lesson with Group Five, mentioned in section 5.1.1, if I had had a chance, I would have invited them again for a focus group discussion instead of individual interviews. Their silence manifested in that group was collective; therefore, I think that their participation as a group would have enriched my findings even more and may have offered other perspectives.

The second limitation would be my profile as a novice researcher. At the beginning, I felt intimidated to talk to participants or invite them for my research. Ethnographic chats and casual discussions were easier for me than organising meetings for formal interviews. For instance, if an interviewee did not show up in a meeting, I would find it difficult to ask them for another meeting because I considered it as a withdrawal.

Finally, one of the issues that I faced while writing the thesis was trusting my analytical voice. It is not a limitation itself, but it could have saved me time if I did not go back repeatedly to my data analysis chapters and questioning my analysis and interpretations of the findings. Addressing the messiness of data and trying to be logical about the amount of data to include is important at the very early stages of analysis.

8.7. Final thoughts

In this explorative study, my major aim was to provide ethnographic information and to enclose the nature of student silence in an Algerian EFL setting where the study was based. The participants had some apologetically critical views regarding some of the setting's practices, especially those related to the authoritative behaviour of some teachers and the assessment practices. I hope that this study will give some insight to applied linguists, teachers and students, as well as shed light on the existence of a silent learning identity students can use to practice their learning with autonomy and agency to the same extent as talkative students. The study also sought to confirm the beliefs that learning is multifaceted and learning silently has always existed. Given the nature of teaching languages and the emphasis on oral engagement in most teaching methods, silent engagement can be considered a more inclusive approach that accounts for students' varied needs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1   Ethics Compliance Clearance

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

10th October 2019   Ref: 19/A&H/02C

Siham Djedid
c/o School of Language Studies and Applied Linguistics
Faculty of Arts & Humanities

Dear Siham,

Confirmation of ethics compliance for your study – *'Looking into Students' Silence and Participation in the English Language Classroom'*

The Faculty Ethics Chair has reviewed your Ethics Review Checklist application and appropriate supporting documentation for the above project. The Chair has confirmed that your application complies fully with the requirements for proportionate ethical review, as set out in this University's Research Ethics and Governance Procedures.

In confirming compliance for your study, you are reminded that it is your responsibility to follow, as appropriate, the policies and procedures set out in the *Research Governance Framework* (http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/research-and-consultancy/governance-and-ethics/governance-and-ethics.aspx) and any relevant academic or professional guidelines. This includes providing, if appropriate, information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data.

Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course should be notified via email to red.resgov@canterbury.ac.uk and may require a new application for ethics approval.

It is a condition of compliance that you **must** inform red.resgov@canterbury.ac.uk once your research has completed.

Wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Penny

Penny Keogh
Research Integrity & Development Officer
Email: red.resgov@canterbury.ac.uk

CC   Dr Kevin Balchin, Supervisor

Appendix 2

A sample of Students' Semi-structured Interview Questions

Students' Interview Questions

Sociolinguistic Competence:

« If speech is silver, silence is golden » what does this proverb mean to you?

Would it be relevant in the classroom to consider silence as golden?

There are places and situations where people are expected to remain silent. What are these places and situations to you?

Which situations, activities, practices in the classroom, you would rather choose to be silent?

Classroom Dynamics

Tell me about your classroom?

Who do you enjoy working with?

Do you mind working in groups? What makes it different from working individually or in pairs?

How would you describe yourself in terms of participation?

Do you think that you have enough opportunities to participate?

When is it easy for you to speak and when is it particularly difficult?

Sometimes, when people start learning a language, they may not feel comfortable in using it in front of the public. Do you relate with this statement? Who is this public to you? How do you handle this?

Do you enjoy preparing for oral presentations? Do students give you feedback about your presentation? Do you give feedback to other students?

Social Status, Autonomy and Agency

Sometimes, when there is a topic for discussion, and you have something to say, do you usually say it or miss the opportunity?

Are your teachers available for questions outside the classroom?

How do you deal with aspects of the lesson that you have not understood?

We hear the phrase "students are responsible of their own learning", what does this mean to you?

During and at the end of the lesson, does your teacher ask you whether you have questions?

Do you tend to ask questions when you do not understand something?

When you have difficulties in saying something in English, what do you usually do about it?

What do you expect from your teacher?

If you are to suggest something regarding it, what would it be?

Outside Classroom events

There are some clubs here where people are invited to submit their artistic works, "drawings, paints, poems, short stories....etc" and they are presented in exhibitions in the day of the event. How do you see such opportunities? Do you have a talent that you better express yourself in it?

Do you share it with public, or you prefer to keep it for yourself?

In the GVC, students can develop their intercultural knowledge; they meet and talk with people from many parts of the world and they practice their English.

Have you considered joining?

Final thoughts:

Do you consider yourself as someone silent?

Appendix 3. A Sample of Teachers' Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your teaching style?

2. In your career, you have taught different classes, with different dynamics and characteristics. If I ask you to recall two which are for you so different or might have left a lasting impression.

3. What is participation for you? How important is it for learning?

4. What are the techniques that you use in order to increase your students' participation?

5. How do students respond to these techniques?

6. Do you consider that learning is reflected in talk?

7. How do teachers ensure that learning is still taking place?

8. If I say "silent student", what comes to your mind?

9. Do you have any memory of any current or previous silent student?

10. According to you, why are some students more silent than others?

11. How do you usually deal with such students? And how do you break their silences?

12. How does this affect their participation marks?

13. Again, what counts as participation for you?

14. what are the forms of participation that you consider as "off-topic" or irrelevant?

Appendix 4

Students' Diaries

Can you write about instances when you wanted to say something in the classroom, but you could not? It could be: a comment, a questions, an answer, feedback, stating your opinion or anything that include speaking.

In your opinion, what caused you not to orally participate?

What would you do differently if you had the chance to change that event?

NB. You can use English, Arabic, Dardja and French.