Exploring Factors Underlying Intermediate Students' Silence in English as Second Language Classroom: A Phenomenological Case Study

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Abstract

English is a prima facie case of high significance in the academic milieu. Therefore, the researchers attempted to understand students' performance, participation, and willingness to communicate; however, students' silence in English as second language (L2) has received little attention leaving a chasm for investigation. Thus, this study aimed to explore the factors underlying students' silence, and to uncover the dynamics of interaction of these factors in L2 classroom. To answer research questions, the pragmatist explanatory sequential design was adopted. The participant selection rested on silent student identification through quantitative survey results, and then interviews were conducted with the selected participants. The findings suggested that anxiety, fear, lack of confidence, lack of L2 knowledge, and first language interference impact students' participation in L2 classroom resulting in silence. These problems directly affect students' speaking proficiency, speaking with confidence, and participating in L2 activities. This implies that the students need appropriate training of L2. Moreover, the innovative teaching methods may prove instrumental in developing students' motivation to initiate active participation in L2, a conducive classroom environment creates a supportive culture for mustering courage to participate in L2 discussion without being belittled by the peers or teacher that may cause fear, anxiety, lack of confidence, and feelings of demotivation among learners which may limit learning experience in L2. Future research may focus on the instructor's perspective to comprehend students' in L2 classroom. The parental role in family structure, home psychology, and home sociology may induces silence. Mores studies may opt for cross sectional and longitudinal investigations.

Keywords: *silence, confidence, L2 classroom, medical students, Government College*

Introduction

The verbal irresponsiveness of pre-medical intermediate students in this context has been referred to in many previous works, and there is much empirical evidence of Government College students, however, there exists scanty boy of significant empirical studies on students' silence that is placed at the center of investigation within the tertiary education of Pakistan (Qudoos et al., 2022). How is this possible? Maybe, silence seems to be obscure phenomenon that exists on the fringes of our awareness. Due to this lack of awareness and limited supply of relevant literature that struggles to address the issue especially when compared to elements of L2 learners' conversation, most educational researchers uninterested in silence (Qudoos et al., 2022).

For many years, official correspondence in Pakistan has been in English, the country's second language. However, students are required to study English as a subject (Ahmad et al., 2023). According to Muhammad et al. (2023) students show different behavior while communicating in the second language classroom. Some students have good communication skills especially in speaking, while others demonstrate shyness and reticence in speaking in class (Teng, 2020).

The literature informed anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, traditional methods of teaching, less opportunity to talk, differences in the languages like Sindhi, Urdu, and Punjabi behind students' irresponsiveness (Nurrohmah & Waloyo, 2021). But a convincing argument is that students with impressive grades in the exams, have a good grip on reading and writing skills but, somehow, are not good in speaking; they avoid speaking and discussions with peers in class. Conversely, other students with little reading and writing skills still try to communicate in L2. The interesting argument is the variations in the dominant skills of learners which led the current study to explore the factors of silence in L2 in Pakistan.

Literature Review

In education, English holds prime significance from the primary to postgraduate levels. But most concerns are associated with teaching of English. For instance, Akram et al. (2018) opined that teaching English is a contentious issue; it has suffered from significant historical, political, linguistic, and procedural ineffectiveness in the educational system of Pakistan. Because it is a mode of communication, and a medium of instruction in education, therefore, it is treated as mandatory in the public and private sectors (Raza, 2022). Moreover, English is taught as a

subject in schools, particularly in government colleges. Due to its linguistic and phonological differences with the first language, teachers face significant challenges in teaching students who come from diverse academic, socio-cultural, and familial backgrounds with limited background knowledge of L2. The status of L2 for students creates lots of problems like anxiety, demonization and, sometimes, complete silence. Students are unable to express their ideas in L2, so they usually face problems and tend to avoid speaking in L2 class (Akram et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework on Silence

The second language acquisition relates several disciplines including, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, and education. Some of those are *Memory and second-language acquisition, Semantic theory, Socio-cultural theory, Complex Dynamic Systems Theory.* The main focus of the study is to apply the dynamic theory as the data is dynamic and complex.

The complex dynamic system theory (CDST) is a theory of cognitive development of a child (Levac & DeMatteo, 2009). The CDST is useful to understand changes and how silence changes from moment to moment. The CDST is highly useful to understand silence in the classroom because the CDST approach offers flexibility to researchers. The CDST provides a conceptual framework that helps to view the silence of students in the classroom, institutional level, and at social levels. Silence is such a complex and varied phenomenon which calls for a flexible and interdisciplinary approach allowed by the CDST. The branch of mathematics is deep-rooted in natural and social science (De Bot et al., 2007), the CDST has come to the forefront as a theoretical framework in the field of applied linguistic. The CDST framework reflects the real-life complexity and recognizes that the behavior of an individual is continuously influenced by multiple and interrelated variables which change constantly over time. Larsen-Freeman (2023) described that in the CDST, the researcher focuses on the elements of the learners such as willingness to communicate, and environment in which learning takes place; and other changes that affect the motivation of learner. On other hand the, the linguistic factors like L1 interference, anxiety, and social background also affect learning L2. As our analytical perspective changes the domain of learning (affective, cognitive etc.) also changes. This study has similar dynamic state where students' participation in L2 class is subject to motivation, anxiety etc. of the cognitive domain.

Factors Causing Student Silence in L2 Classroom

The most effective way of developing learner's competence in L2 classrooms is to provide sufficient opportunities to learners to participate in a discourse which involves the meaningful process of exchanging information (Robinson, 2022). However, it can be found that silence in L2 classroom is a common phenomenon. After doing a literature review, the literature suggests that there may be various aspects that lead to classroom silence but learning factors like lack of confidence, student's personality, student gender, motivation, L1 interference are the major factors that lead to students' silence in L2 classroom.

According to Harya (2022), students are unconfident in their language competence; they are afraid of being laughed at by their teachers and peers; they are afraid of doing mistakes in the class. Fear of anxiety causes students' silence in the class. Additionally, low proficiency, and lack of opportunities also contribute to student silence in L2 class.

Gender is one of the main factors that cause significant difference in speaking anxiety in L2 classes. Gender has been pointed as positive factor in developed countries whereas in Pakistan, it is considered negative because of cultural differences. Rehman et al. (2022) maintained that usually female students show more anxious attitude in L2 classes due to many factors such as proficiency, security, and inferiority/superiority complexes.

Motivation in L2 classroom is to provide psychological and cognitive boost to students while giving them the benefit of being the active participants in discussions, responding to questions of teachers, and expressing ideas to teachers and peers (Liu, 2022). Students get appraisal of the peers, teachers, and the group participants in L2 classrooms. It enhances the responsibility of getting higher grades and making them proficient in getting success in aptitude tests and career tests conducted by different universities and institutes for admissions. Furthermore, they can get better jobs due to their proficiency in English that may help them in qualifying interviews (Liu, 2022).

Learning English as a second language is never too easy. Particularly, those students face challenges in their English class whose English language is not a native language, suppose people from African countries face many difficulties while learning English as a second language. The learners may often face many challenges. The most overlooked problem which

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seems in the second language classroom is the unqualified teachers (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013). Students are unable to recognize what is right and wrong because students are new to the second language, for right or wrong, they follow their teacher. Another problem that students face in L2 classroom is a limited learning environment which means the environment is bounded till the classroom, students are strictly said to speak English in L2 classroom.

The Conceptual Framework

Kurzon's (1998) study examined silence within a generally interpretive framework and recognizes that its meaning has contextual orientations. Since, each community has its own tolerance-limit for how long a conversation may go without speaking, Kurzon correctly suggested that the understanding of silence must be culturally specific. Kurzon like Jaworski and Sachdev (1998) examined silence that takes place in dyadic encounters using theories from a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, linguistics, and especially, conversation analysis. Kurzon used a modal interpretation of silence in a person to determine their excuse for not attempting to speak, with 'knowing' or 'capacity to communicate' as starting points. The silent recipient may or may not understand the answer to the question being posed to them. If they know, there are two options: speaking in answer to a question in a group, or remaining silent, which is uncooperative, if the addressee, however, is unsure of the response, they can respond in one of the two ways: remaining silent or replying "I don't know," I've claimed that because people frequently feel uneasy when forced to admit their ignorance, therefore, they prefer to keep it a secret when they are not required to speak. This game is frequently played by a student sitting in the back of the class (Kurzon, 1998). Moreover, when analyzing silence, the ability/inability to talk should be considered. He divides speaking difficulties into two groups: lack of information on the one hand, and lack of talent/ability on the other; conversely, psychological impairments such as shyness or anxiousness. So, according to Kurzon (1998), silence results from psychological restraints are harmful. Unintentional, characterized by the addressee's lack of control over their response, and, thus, lapse into silence. It is claimed that silence is chosen on purpose. However, this is the result of "a sincere decision taken by addressee that may be expressed verbally in a speech act...for example, "I will not speak" (Kurzon, 1998).

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The modal representation of silence found to be a beneficial tool for determining a person's major justification for not answering a question verbally (Figure 1). Following are the three feasible modal representations of silence (Kurzon, 1998): unintentional silence as a result of psychological restraints "I cannot talk"; intentional silence as a result of the addressee's own decision "I will/shall not speak"; and intentional silence as a result of an external reason "I must/may not speak". These modal interpretations can then be incorporated into the basic model for interpreting silent responses depicted below:

Figure 1
Interpretation of Silence
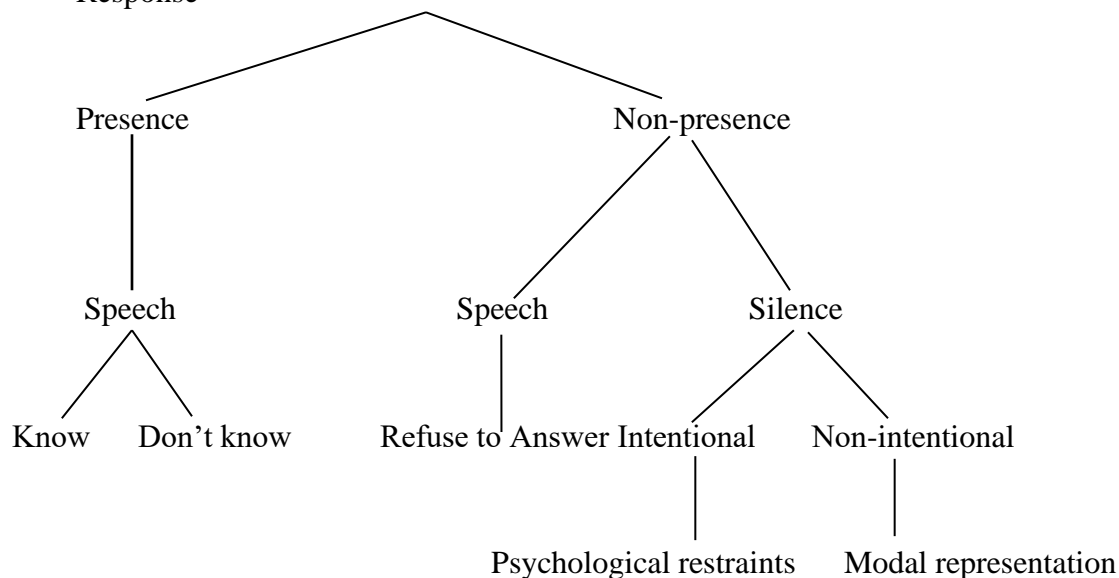
Note. Adopted from Kurzon (1998).

The seminal literature review suggested the following research questions:

What learner related factors underlie silence of pre-medical students in English as a Second Language classroom?

What are dynamics of interactions between factors underlying students' silence in L2 classroom?

Methodology

The main objective of the study was to look at the reasons behind L2 students' silence in class from their own perspective. It is insufficient to comprehend a student's silence outside of their specific working environment. The researchers began with the premise that all human activities have purpose and must be analyzed and evaluated in the light of prevailing social norms. As a

result, the epistemological viewpoint stood as pragmatic. The pragmatic perspective on learning emphasizes that education should have real-world applications and relevance. To achieve this, educators often incorporate real-life situations and examples that students may experience or have already experienced (Dolan et al., 2022). The present study employed a phenomenological case study. The phenomenologists seek to explore the real-life encounters of a specific group of individuals in order to effectively capture and describe their subjective realities within a particular context (Karali, 2022). By employing phenomenological research, one can gain a deeper understanding of the human experience, and obtain a comprehensive perspective from the participant. These participants possess first-hand personal knowledge that provides descriptive and subjective data, enabling the researcher to develop a deeper comprehension of the "lived experience" associated with a particular event (Karali, 2022). By combining the phenomenological approach with the case study method, researchers can effectively unravel and comprehend intricate human experiences, grasping the fundamental nature and underlying structure of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

Exploring the context sensitivity, multiplicity, and flexibility of factors influencing students' silence require properly designed research and a toolkit. A sequential explanatory mixed method design helps to identify the factors that cannot be easily measured or hear silenced voices of students (Creswell, 2014). The reason for the selection of sequential explanatory mixed method design is to first identify the respondents who remain silent in the L2 class and then incorporating qualitative part allows for a deeper exploration of participants' thoughts and emotions related to silence in the L2 classroom (Creswell, 2014). The study proceeded in two phases.

Phase I

The primary goal of phase I was to serve as a constructive and informative process, aiding in the advancement of pertinent inquiries and offering conceptual clarity for the research design. The purpose to conduct phase I was to observe and identify those students who remain silent in the classroom. The process of participant selection involved some steps.

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Classroom Observations

There were fifteen L2 classroom observations conducted. The seating layout was divided into two sections: on the right side of the classroom, there were seats reserved for girls, while, on the left side, the seats were reserved for boys. The observation sessions were conducted in person as a nonparticipant observer, and no recordings were made due to official restrictions. The observations were noted in the related categories of the observation sheet, and at the same time recorded in the observation sheets. Two observations were made every week, one for the male teacher, and one for the female teacher as the courses of prose and novel were distributed between them. The male teacher taught prose on the first three days of the week (Monday to Wednesday), and the female teacher taught novel on other days of the week (Thursday to Saturday). The L2 classes were observed after seeking consent for observation. The male teacher on Monday, and the female teacher on Thursday for the female teacher. The observation duration was 50 minutes for both teachers and sub-divided into 5-minute intervals to observe silence.

The Selection of Participants

The selection of the participants for the current study was conducted by following the purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is one of the most controlling instruments to gather selective information-rich cases for the in-depth study (Emmel, 2013). The total population of the current study was 25 students out of that 10 were girls, and fifteen were boys. The participants of the current study were six intermediate students of pre-medical group attending the L2 classes regularly. The key sampling criterion was pre-medical students of the intermediate class. The participants were selected after fifteen observations. In addition, to complement the participant identification process, the researchers verified names of students from other subject teachers and then cross-checked with the in-class observations. The selection of intermediate students had a direct connection to the objectives of the study, as the medium of instruction completely changes from Urdu and Sindhi to English in all taught subjects. The medical students compared to other students of arts, commerce, or computer sciences are more concerned about getting good results. They have to appear in the Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) for admission to medical colleges; so, these students focus more on studies and marks in every subject including English. The choice of pre-medical students as the study sample is in line with the research questions and objectives, as these students typically

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exhibit a higher level of motivation towards their studies, and have a greater need to excel in English in order to clear the MDCAT with flying colors. Additionally, the convenience sampling was used as the participants were from the accessible unit. Convenience sampling is mostly used in the situation when the population is very small and easily available or known (Newby, 2014).

Quantitative Measure

The observations were analyzed carefully to determine frequency of occurrences under specific categories. The responses in L2 classrooms received by participants either verbal (answering question) or non-verbal (remaining silent) were examined keeping in view the classroom environment. From the stimulus to response, and from response type to response duration in seconds, and whether the response was completed or thwarted, every response was checked forits frequency and fluctuation. The frequency of the responses was checked during (all the proportionate sections of 5-minute intervals) in the communication process in the L2 class (Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2022). The factors and nature of silence in individuals were compared to all other participants during the six-week observations. There were twenty-five students from which 10 were female and 15 were male. Table 1 shows the time of speaking of students in fifteen classes under 5 categories—verbal response, nonverbal response, volunteer participation, and yes or no. Every category for each student is filled with number of turns taken by them.

Table 1

A Summary of Students' Response during Observations

	Com	VR	NVR	VP	Y/N	Remarks
M 1	4	3	5	0	3	Somehow spoke in the class
M 2	5	7	6	8	6	Spoke in the class
M 3	0	0	2	0	0	Silent
M 4	7	8	12	6	5	Spoke in the class
M 5	2	4	4	0	1	Somehow spoke in the class
M 6	1	2	1	0	1	Silent most of the time
M 7	4	8	11	7	4	Spoke in the class
M 8	5	7	9	6	6	Spoke in the class
M 9	7	8	7	9	6	Spoke in the class
M 10	0	0	1	0	0	Silent
F 11	5	8	7	4	6	Spoke in the class
F 12	0	2	0	0	0	Silent

F 13	4	5	6	8	5	Spoke in the class
F 14	0	0	0	0	0	Silent
F 15	8	6	7	12	9	Spoke in the class
F 16	7	12	7	8	6	Spoke in the class
F 17	3	5	6	5	4	Spoke in the class
F 18	5	6	12	7	8	Spoke in the class
F 19	4	5	7	7	8	Spoke in the class
F 20	6	7	7	9	10	Spoke in the class
F 21	2	6	4	7	3	Spoke in the class
F 22	1	0	2	1	0	Silent most of the time
F 23	8	10	9	7	5	Spoke in the class
F 24	8	7	8	9	6	Spoke in the class
F 25	7	6	7	8	6	Spoke in the class

Note. M=Male, F=Female, Com=Comment, VR=Verbal Response, NVR=Non-verbal Response, VP=Volunteer Participation, Y=Yes, N=No, Rem=Remarks

King's (2011) observation scheme was used for classroom observations. Participants were selected on the basis of observations, and only silent students of L2 class were selected. Out of twenty-five students, eight students were found silent in the class. Out of which five were boys and three were girls. From eight students, only six volunteered inclusion in the study conducting semi-structured interviews with them.

Context

This study was conducted in the second-year classroom of pre-medical subject of English at the Government Science collage, Karachi. The class consisted of 25 male and female students with age range between 18 and 20. The class was diverse as students belonged to multi-ethnic and multi-cultural backgrounds of Sindh. Most students' mother tongue was Urdu, whereas, others had Sindhi, and Punjabi as their mother tongue. Urdu was taken as lingua franca among all, and it was used as it is the common language for communication among students and teacher.

Demographics

The students participated in the study included three females—Maria, Saima, Humaira, three males—Sohail, Azhar, Asif (all pseudonyms) (Table 2). On average, Maria, Humaira and Asif were 19.3 years old, while Saima, Sohail and Azhar were 19.5 years old. Three participants

were Sindhi speaking, one was Punjabi speaking, and two were Urdu speaking. All participants were proficient in speaking Urdu, as since childhood they were living and receiving education in Karachi.

Table 2
Demographics of the Participants

Participants	Age	Gender	L1	L2 learning experience	Monthly Income
Maria	19.2	Female	Sindhi	8-10 years	30000-35000
Humaira	19.2	Female	Sindhi	10 years	25000-35000
Asif	19.2	Male	Sindhi	10-11 years	30000-40000
Saima	19.5	Female	Punjabi	10 years	35000-40000
Azhar	19.5	Male	Urdu	11 years	30000-35000
Sohail	19.5	Male	Urdu	10 years	30000-40000

Phase II

The phase II of the study comprised the distribution of the consent forms among selected participants. Consequent upon consent approval, the demographic information was sought from the participants, and semi structured interviews were conducted.

Data Collection

Two criteria guided data collection process. First, alignment between study objectives and research design. Second, right methodology for data collection to increase credibility of the study (Faez et al., 2022). So, the quantitative and qualitative procedures were chosen in strict conformity with these two guiding aspects. The non-participant structured observations were used in order to identify, and select silent students from the L2 class. Students' demographics and semi-structured interviews were obtained to inquire how the participants in the intermediate class made sense of their silence because merely observations cannot provide insights into the psychological components of the participants' silence. The data collection process lasted for six weeks from 7th September 2021 to 16th November 2021 (Table 3). In the first week, permission was sought from the government offices to conduct observations in the intermediate class.

Table 3
Data Collection Process

	Pilot study	Consent form	Background questionnaire	Semi-structured Interview
Week 1	√			
Week 2		√		
Week 3			√	
Week 4				√
Week 5				√
Week 6				√
Week 7				√
Week 8				√

Before the observations, the intermediate class was visited several times to get to know students, seating arrangements, classroom routines, activities, and in-class interactions. The information on the structure of data collection process over a time scale was followed to meet research deadline.

Semi-structured Interviews

Since interviewees feel free in a semi-structured interview to express thoughts and opinions in answer to the interview guide; it also encourages them to provide more pertinent useful information, especially their personal views over issues. They can provide reasons for their answers easily and clearly, which they fail to provide during observations (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The current study applied semi-structured interviews as the phenomenon of silence is extremely complex and dynamic. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the nature of the variables.

The researchers conducted individual interviews with participants where results of the observations were also shared, and some questions were asked from participants related to their silence in L2 class. The main purpose of sharing results with semi-structured interviews was to unearth the reasons behind silence in the L2 classroom. Although the interview questions were pre-planned, additional topics such as the students' silence and the participants' past and on-going English language learning perceptions emerged during the interview, and were discussed further.

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Data Analysis

The data were analyzed and interpreted from the perspective of research questions and the complex dynamic system theory (CDST). The method of data analysis involved within-and-cross-case analysis. Within case deals with the examination and interpretation of individual case using facts from the data (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2016). While the cross-case analysis focuses on comparative analysis of the participants' data (Duff & Doherty, 2015). Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum (2016) described the cross-case analysis as where the researcher analyzes the process and the results received, and understands the nature of the process through specific contextual variables. The collected data were transcribed; translated, and assigned codes; lastly, themes were generated based on with-in and cross-case analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The data were sorted, coded, organized into themes before extracting meaning and interpreting (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

This first part of inquiry provided details of findings of the answer to the first research question, what factors affect silence in the L2 classroom of intermediate (Pre-medical) students in Government College, Karachi.

Learner/Learning-related Factors

Individual differences in memory testing vary among all people, and several of these factors have a direct impact on classroom learning and the learning environment. (Wentzel & Skinner, 2022) The study explored the learner factors such as anxiety, confidence, motivation, lack of L2 knowledge, gender fear, personality and L1 interference that affect the performance of the 2nd year pre-medical students of the Government College, Karachi.

Anxiety

Communication anxiety in the classroom context is known as apprehension or participation anxiety. It is considered situational anxiety which arises due to students' fear as they think they would not be able to perform well in front of the teacher or their peers. Especially, answering the questions in front of the class (either on teacher's call or volunteering themselves). Anxiety is found to be the most dominating psychological factor affecting second-year pre-medical students' silence in the L2.

Maria remained silent in class during the third observation for 40 minutes, even though she was asked a question by the teacher. As she was fearful of being laughed at by the classmates or teacher which caused her anxiety, as a result, she didn't participate. At the same time, Asif in the same observation raised his hand in response to the question asked by the teacher, but he couldn't complete his reply due to fear of criticism for his bad pronunciation. Maria responded, '*Fear of students' laughing at me made me unable to speak in class because my English language is not good'*. Asif expressed:

As I belong to the Sindhi family, and my pronunciation is not good so usually class makes fun of me and I feel awkward especially in front of girls, therefore, I usually fear speaking English even if I want to.

The participants expressed reasons for not participating in the class due to open criticism and making fun either from students' and or teacher's end. This refers to the classroom culture and teacher's awareness of creating conducive environment for learning, and cherishing emotional support for all in the class for effective involvement of all students in the L2 classroom.

Lack of Confidence

Helping students to talk in language classes is a problematic phenomenon for language teachers. Confidence is often considered a relevant aspect of language learning Lack of confidence has been found second most powerful factor affecting students' performance causing silence among the second-year pre-medical students in the L2 classroom at Government College of Karachi. The participants in the observation remained silent in the class during fourth observation for a complete period of teaching. They agreed that the lack of confidence was mainly because of feeling ashamed in class. Azhar had the cadet schooling background with good grammar and vocabulary of English language. He accepted that he remained silent in L2 class because of lack of confidence caused by the coeducation class, and other gender of the teacher. Azhar expressed his ideas, '*I remained silent in the class due to gender fear as I studied in boys' school till my matriculation, but here due to coeducation setup, and a female teacher, I lost my confidence'*. Humaira also expressed her ideas on lack of confidence:

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I tried many times to take part in class activities but I started shivering before speaking in front of the class because of fear of being criticized, and the thought of being laughed at me, and, that's how I lose confidence.

The same expression of the lack of confidence was denoted by Maria and Sohail. They accepted that they usually participate in class activities because of lack of confidence. It was also observed that students usually didn't perform because of the thought of bad performance, and criticism or shame. This creates a barrier in students' learning and using language to their advantage.

Lack of Motivation

The motivation was the third dominant factor affecting the performance of the second-year pre-medical students' silence in L2 class. The participants told that lack of motivation was caused by teaching methods, topics, teachers' behavior, anxiety, and personality. Saima in the class remained silent during the 5th observation; she explained the reason for her silence that she had less interest in the subject and the inappropriate behavior of the teacher during the teaching drama section. One interviewee Saima told:

I was lazy and less interested in a class that day because I don't like reading novels/drama. It's so boring to me and of no use in common life, moreover, the teacher usually targets me that irritates me and demotivates me from speaking in class.

In the words of Humaira, the second interviewee told:

I avoided speaking in class most of the time because of my introverted and shy nature for that I have always been pinched for it by my peers it irritated me and kept me demotivated to talk to them or to share anything in the class.

Furthermore, the teachers' behavior remained a core factor in Saima's silence as she was targeted by the teacher to participate in a subject that was not of her interest. The results of the analysis suggested that the behavior of the teacher or students causes demotivation among students. The other students who were in the class like Humaira also commented that sarcastic remarks of students or teachers demotivated students and lessen their spirit for participation in L2 activities. So, shyness as an internal and criticism as external demotivator tumbles students' interest and results in silence in L2 class.

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Lack of L2 knowledge

Lack of knowledge and competence in L2 were the fourth major factor affecting the performance of second-year pre-medical students causing silence in L2 classroom. The primary causes behind the lack of knowledge in L2 were: methodology, teachers' training, subject or topic knowledge, motivation, L1 interference, and personality. Humaira admitted that she usually did not participate in class activities because she thought that peers and teachers would criticize her for making lots of mistakes. One interviewee maintained:

I always wanted to talk in class. In the beginning, I did so, but being educated from the government school of Sindhi medium, my English grammar and vocabulary are weak. Therefore, I have a performance full of grammatical errors, and less appropriate vocabulary.

The grammatical errors and vocabulary errors cause lots of structural problems for students and reduce their marks in comprehensive final exams to second-year pre-medical students, the teachers usually pointed them out and corrected them (as observed during class observations) in front of the class. The participants found it demotivating and they avoided taking part in class activities to hide their weaknesses of L2 knowledge and competence.

The Fear of Gender

The fear of gender has been found as the moderate factor as the majority of male students found it not so powerful to affect performance, yet on the other side, the majority of females showed that there is a role of gender in the class. The fear of gender was found between student to student and the student to teacher communication. Sohail admitted that very often he remained silent in the class when he was asked to work with girl(s) in pair or group, or during classes the teacher was not of his gender. Maria on the other hand expressed the same views about the fear of gender and its impact on participation in speaking. Sohail expressed his ideas:

I usually feel internal fear while speaking in a class where female students are present or the female teacher is teaching. And in this class, the male ratio was more as compared to females, and I was afraid of talking in front of male classmates.

Maria also shared her views:

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I belong to the Sindhi family, and I studied in a girls' school. I had less experience talking to boys, therefore, when I am asked to take part in class, I feel fear about boys in the class, or even when talking to the male teacher.

The quotes signify that the fear of opposite gender affects participants' interaction and participation in the L2 classroom. The fear of talking in front of the opposite gender was found among all participants; either it was student to student communication, or student to teacher communication. Participants argued that the fear of gender was because of their past schooling experience that was based on exclusive schools for boys and girls.

Personality of Learner

Personality factors were found to affect the silence of second-year students in the L2 classroom. The personality factors like shyness and introversion. Less confident students like Maria, Humaira, and Asif while filling out the biodata questionnaire exhibited introversion and shyness while talking to family members, friends, parents, and teachers. Their information showed that they were having some natural tendencies of shyness and introversion. Both students accepted that because of their introverted nature, they usually failed to participate in the L2 classroom activities. For example, *"I am very shy, therefore, whenever, the teacher calls me to speak on any topic, I feel shyness".* Similarly, Asif told, '*I usually remain silent because it is my nature that I am shy of talking in front of girls. So, while answering any question, I usually avoid it because of my shy nature'.*

During observation, it came out that not only students like Asif and Maria but also non-participants were found victims of personality related factors as they were so shy that they were even whispering to each other. They could not keep eye contact with each other, especially with the opposite gender. So, shyness and introverted personality traits posed a threat to students' speaking in the L2 class.

L1 Interference

The L1 interference was not found as the prominent factor among all participants at the same level, but in most participants to some extent. The real causes were expressed by participants in background information that they mostly studied either in Urdu or in their mother tongue. So, the

impact of L1 caused mainly pronunciation problems and grammatical and syntactical issues at a minor level. Azhar expressed his views, *'My pronunciation in English is not good because of my Sindhi background. That's why, I mostly avoid participating in conversations in classes.'* Moreover, Asif told in an interview: '*I tried to speak several times but due to some bad structures and grammar, I remained silent because I couldn't make difference in the use of tenses.'*

During the observation, most of the participants remained silent and they were asked about the reason. The participants accepted that due to L1 interference, they felt difficulty in speaking, especially, students with Sindhi and Punjabi backgrounds. They were found weak in pronunciation, and they pronounced words incorrectly. During observation, Asif pronounced the word 'striking' as /istraɪ:king/ and not /ˈstraɪkɪŋ/. The L1 interference was specifically affecting reading aloud, and speaking as the pronunciation was noticeable with errors in their participation which resulted in episodic silence in the L2 classroom.

Complex and Dynamic Pattern of Silence

The results of the analysis highlighted that the nature of silence is complex and dynamic in participants, and involves significant features like interconnectedness, non-linearity, complexity, and sensitive dependence on contextual conditions. The analysis showed that the dynamic state of the silence of 2nd-year pre-medical students in Government College has inter-connectivity and interdependence with the other variables. Due to that no variable can be studied and analyzed independently or in isolation. Therefore, every feature has been described with examples to understand the interconnectivity and non-linearity of every characteristic. This makes it clear that behind silence are interwoven relations of cognitive processes which stimulate or reduce the use of mental resources to respond to a stimulus in the L2 scenario.

Silence is complex because it has a multifaceted connection to the main themes from contextual variables to linguistic variables, and then with the psychological. The thematic analysis presents the response of Saima, '*I was silent because I don't think that these dramas have any value in our lives. Additionally, the teacher always targets me that I don't like and I remain silent in their class'.* Moreover, another participant said, *'I usually, remained bored in the class because I*

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avoid reading novels or drama it doesn't interest me because it's away from normal society. On the other hand, the teacher mostly used irritating behavior, so, I don't take part in the class'.
If observed minutely, the response of the participant informed that they first-hand looked demotivated because of the topic or subject (that was a contextual factor) which shows that the topic is interconnected, and motivation is dependent on contextual factors. Moreover, the behavior of the teacher also caused fear and anxiety for her to remain silent. This justifies the position that silence is complex as confounding, mediating and moderating variables affect silence. The moderating variables beyond the scope of this study make it complex to furnish the strength and direction of relationship between variables.

Interconnectivity

The results showed interconnectedness and interdependence of multiple factors. The lack of confidence and low linguistic competence show interconnectivity and interdependence causing silence in the l2 class. The following quote proved multiplicity of among variables. Maria told, '*I was not confident in myself that will give the answer because of bad pronunciation. This fear of talking made me silent in the class'.*
In the example above Maria expressed that she didn't speak because she lacked L2 knowledge. The linguistic competence causes fear or anxiety that is the result of her interdependence of competence and confidence. Possibly, the other reason for exhibiting silence may attribute to the past inverse behavior of the teachers and peers who might have discouraged them in gaining confidence, and participate in speaking in the L2 class. So, the interdependence of confidence on linguistic competence is also the factor that connectivity and dependence are complex and dynamic characteristics.

Nonlinearity

The interview analysis also found that slight or no change in one element can entirely change the result of the participation of the participant in the L2 classroom. Whereas, sometimes major change in one element doesn't bring a slight change in the silence of the participant in the L2 classroom. Several facilitating or demotivating factors cannot bring any significant change in the performance of the 2nd year pre-medical students in the L2 class. Maria informed:

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Today in the class, I wanted to speak as I was prepared to talk, and the teacher was repeatedly asking me to speak too, students were also clapping to come in front, but I couldn't because I lacked L2 competence, and pronunciation.

This shows that despite having the favorable environment for participation in the in-class activities, participant failed to talk this indicates that even a major change in one aspect can't bring change in another element. Asif told:

I never participated in class because I usually faced negative looks of the students…But today all the students supported me to speak, and came in front… However, I spoke but couldn't complete my task because of a lack of confidence.

This instance shows that students who mostly remain silent in the class are because of criticism from peers but when criticism changes to encouragement, silence changes to speech with progressive confidence. It is proved that environmental support from teacher and peers affect the result of the performance of the participants in the L2 classroom.

Discussion

The study was conducted with the aim to identify the factors causing silence among the students of intermediate pre-medical group in a government college, Karachi. The study focused on the factors that cause silence among students through a sequential explanatory mixed method design. The results of the first research question revealed that there are multiple factors contributing to silence in students in L2 classroom. Students themselves, and teachers were found responsible to students' silence in L2 classroom. The first finding of the study revealed that students themselves and their personalities, anxiety, confidence, motivation, and their second language proficiency causes silence in L2 classroom. Anxiety was found the most affecting factor among most participants caused by L2 knowledge, and factors like teacher behavior, class environment and the fear of gender in general were found to have less effect. The literature supports that due to anxiety, students lack in confidence, and remain silent in the classroom (Nurrohmah & Waloyo, 2021). Moreover, in second language acquisition, linguistic competence of learner is considered very complex linguistic system that is referred to intra-language grammar proficiency (Markey, 2022). The findings of the study also revealed that students were found fearful about gender disparity, students were found that they felt comfortable to communicate with peers and teachers of same gender. In addition, students were found confused and lacked confidence when talking

in front of teacher of opposite gender or in front of the whole class (Galvin et al., 2013). Literature further indicated that if people peep into their own school years, they might recall the particular difference in the way teachers treated boys and girls, for instance, being more severely criticized or perform better (Sproesser et al., 2022). However, some teachers intentionally treat boys and girls differently, these actions affect students' learning (Swan, 2017).

Implications

The findings allude to teachers' and management's roles to ensure bias free environment toward gender so that students feel comfortable with opposite gender. The students need encouragement to speak L2 no matter if their pronunciation is affected by L1. In class, teachers and peers required to establish a culture of mutual respect for all without making any reference to students' competence and performance, and teachers need to create opportunities for students to participate more to overcome their deficiencies, and introversion. Likewise, teachers are required to involve struggling students more in the classroom activities as confidence building measure. Only by fostering students' L2 knowledge, confidence and participation, anxiety can be reduced. Therefore, inclusion of additional sessions on grammar and L2 language structure may prove a great deal of help. Moreover, teachers need to design refresher course for students upon joining college by conducting the language proficiency placement test. Similarly, teachers need to converse in L2 in the English subject classes throughout the year to familiarize students with the accent and right pronunciation, and create room for oral communication inside the classroom. An institutional and classroom culture help a long way to address differences while treating genders. The exiting L2 curriculum content for intermediate level shows a limitation in scope through an inappropriate representation of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills which needs revision for developing linguistic competence in students. The self-efforts of the teachers for developing linguistic competence among students can prove instrumental. The parental role holds significance in the provision of healthy personal and personality development at home for demonstration of later confidence and extroversion.

Recommendations

 The findings of the study surface factors that cause silence among students attribute to students' lack of L2 knowledge, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation. Therefore, focus need to be

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given to enhance the basic knowledge of grammar, syntax, morphology, and the vocabulary of the students when they join college. If the basic knowledge of student is satisfactory, they take part in L2 class activities, their confidence boosts, and overcome anxiety or fear of speaking. Next, the teacher needs to encourage students to speak English in the class even their pronunciation is not good, and the language structure is broken. Teacher suggest ways to improve student pronunciation, and discourage the practice of laughing at the students when they speak unclearly. This way, the students can gain confidence, and reduce anxiety. For maximum education outcome, teachers are required to create conducive and friendly environment especially when they are of the opposite gender to that of the participants in L2 class. As some students' schooling experiences are different from the existing schooling realities, they remain confused, and find themselves socially excluded in a different learning environment. Until students adapt themselves to new settings, they need careful attention of teachers and school management.

Conclusion

The study used the complex dynamic systems theory as a lens, and built a theoretical framework for analyzing students' silence in L2 classroom. Two research questions guide the inquiry, which focused on factors leading to students' silence in L2 class, and their dynamic interaction with each other. The factors explored were related to anxiety, fear of gender, topic, confidence, and motivation, lack of grammatical competence, academic achievement, and vocabulary. Most significantly, the study summarized that silence in L2 classroom exhibits characteristics of dynamism, connectivity and nonlinearity. A complex, dynamic, and nonlinear interaction of interdependent variables govern the level of silence in L2 classroom. Silence in the L2 classrooms is sensitive to beginning circumstances, such as personality, learner's educational background, content knowledge, and students' beliefs about teacher's behavior. Due to nonlinear interplay of underlying variables, variations in silence in the L2 class at a specific point in a discussion are not foreseeable; nevertheless, the overall behavior of silence can be predicted by identifying the variable. The study has restrictions that may limit the generalizability and replicability of the current study findings in other contexts.

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