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THE SILENT GLOBAL CITIZEN: CHALLENGING THE MYTH OF THE IDEAL EFL LEARNER

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Abstract: Classroom participation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often equated with speaking frequently, answering questions confidently, and taking an active verbal role in classroom discussions. As a result, students who remain silent are frequently viewed as passive learners or as lacking motivation and communicative ability. This study questions that assumption by exploring how silent and reflective participation contributes to learning and to the development of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) competencies in the EFL classroom. A mixed-methods design was employed at Batna-2 University, Algeria. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 36 third-year EFL students and 15 university EFL teachers, together with classroom observations of the same student group across ten teaching sessions. Combining teachers' and students' perspectives with classroom observations made it possible to examine not only why students remain silent but also how silence functions during classroom interaction. The findings indicate that silence is not a single or fixed behaviour. Instead, it serves different purposes depending on the classroom context. Students frequently associated silence with listening carefully, thinking before responding, processing information, and showing respect for others, although they also acknowledged that it could sometimes reflect anxiety or uncertainty. Teachers, however, were more likely to interpret silence as a lack of participation or understanding, revealing a noticeable gap between teachers' and students' perceptions. Classroom observations further showed that teaching practices such as allowing sufficient wait time, rephrasing questions, and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere encouraged reflective participation. Moreover, many silent students demonstrated behaviours linked to empathy, respect, and intercultural awareness, suggesting that meaningful engagement does not always require verbal participation. The study argues that silence should not automatically be interpreted as disengagement. Instead, it should be recognised as a legitimate and potentially productive form of classroom participation. By highlighting the educational value of reflective engagement, the study challenges the traditional image of the "ideal" EFL learner as necessarily outspoken and extroverted, and calls for more inclusive approaches to participation and assessment that acknowledge different ways students engage with learning.

***Keywords**:* EFL classrooms, global citizenship education, learner participation, reflective silence

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1. Introduction

In EFL education, the notion of the "ideal learner" has traditionally been associated with confidence, verbal participation, and active engagement in classroom interactions (Dörnyei, 1994; Naiman et al., 1978). This image is largely shaped by Western educational traditions that value extroversion, individual initiative, and immediate verbal contributions (Holliday, 2005; Kubota, 2011). However, learners differ in personality, culture, and learning style. Many students prefer to listen, reflect, and respond thoughtfully rather than speak frequently, yet these behaviours are often undervalued in classrooms that associate talkativeness with competence (Cheng, 2002; King & Harumi, 2020).

Research has long explored classroom silence and reflective engagement in language learning (Peng, 2024; King & Harumi, 2020; Harumi & Bao, 2025), yet these aspects are often considered separately from broader educational goals. Few studies examine how quiet or reflective learners can actively contribute to ethical, intercultural, and empathetic practices aligned with Global Citizenship Education (GCE) (O'Flaherty et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2015). At the same time, research on global citizenship and global competence in language education tends to focus on curriculum design and intercultural learning (Golden, 2025; Lütge et al., 2022; Rauschert, 2022), paying little attention to the indirect dynamics of classroom participation. As a result, EFL teaching can unintentionally favour more extroverted learners, neglecting the valuable contributions of those who engage quietly. This gap highlights the need to integrate reflective engagement with global citizenship objectives in language education.

Understanding the role of silent learners is therefore essential for fostering inclusive classrooms that recognize diverse forms of participation. By linking reflective engagement with GCE competencies, educators can redefine what it means to be a "successful" learner, moving beyond culturally biased notions of extroversion and verbal output. This perspective also supports the development of empathy, intercultural awareness, and ethical participation—skills that are increasingly important in globalized educational contexts.

This paper aims to explore the intersection of silence, personality, and participation in EFL classrooms and to examine how these factors relate to the development of global citizenship competencies. Specifically, it investigates how students' personality traits influence their classroom participation and use of silence, how teachers interpret and respond to silent behaviours, and how reflective engagement contributes to the cultivation of empathy, respect, and intercultural awareness. By addressing these questions, the study seeks to challenge the traditional image of the "ideal learner" and to promote more inclusive and ethically informed approaches to EFL teaching. The study's contribution to the literature is threefold. First, whereas classroom silence and Global Citizenship Education have largely been examined as distinct areas of inquiry, this study establishes an explicit empirical link between reflective silence and specific GCE competencies, namely empathy, respect, and intercultural awareness, thereby extending prevailing conceptions of "meaningful participation" beyond verbal output. Second, the study addresses a recurrent methodological limitation in research on classroom silence, namely reliance on self-reported data, by triangulating questionnaire findings with systematic classroom observation, thus enabling a more rigorous assessment of the extent to which stated beliefs about silence align with observed classroom behaviour. Third, by locating the investigation within an Algerian higher education context, a setting largely absent from the literature on learner participation, the study interrogates the Western-centric assumptions underlying the "ideal learner" construct and offers cross-cultural empirical evidence to inform ongoing debates on inclusive pedagogy in language education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Myth of the Ideal EFL Learner

The notion of the "ideal EFL learner" functions as a predominant myth in language education: a set of culturally and socially constructed beliefs about what constitutes a successful learner (Holliday, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This myth is not objective but is produced within particular educational discourses that define "effective" and "successful" learner identities (Gee, 2002). The traditional image of the ideal language learner, tracing back to research on successful language-learning strategies in the 1970s (e.g., Naiman et al., 1978), typically favours an individual who is highly motivated, active, communicative, confident, and willing to take risks (Dörnyei, 1994).

This idealized model, however, has been heavily critiqued for reflecting particular cultural and ideological assumptions about language learning and successful learner identity (Holliday, 2005; Kubota, 2011). In many educational contexts, talkativeness, personal expression, individual initiative, and willingness to speak publicly are highly valued. As a result, verbal participation may become an implicit measure of learner engagement and competence. Yet such expectations do not necessarily reflect the full range of ways in which learners engage with classroom learning.

The problem is not that oral participation is unimportant in foreign language learning. Opportunities to speak and interact are essential for developing communicative competence. The problem arises when frequent verbal participation becomes the dominant criterion by which students' engagement and success are evaluated. Within such a framework, learners who listen carefully, reflect before speaking, observe classroom interaction, or contribute selectively may be perceived as less engaged than more verbally active classmates.

This tendency can produce what may be described as an extroversion bias in classroom participation. The learner who speaks frequently, volunteers answers, initiates interaction, and readily expresses opinions may become associated with the image of the "ideal" language learner, while reserved or quiet students may be interpreted through a deficit perspective. Such an interpretation is problematic because silence is not a single, uniform behaviour. Its meaning depends on the learner, the classroom situation, the task, the interactional context, and the reasons underlying the absence of speech.

The need to move beyond narrow definitions of successful language learning has also been highlighted by more recent work on language-learning success. Bernstein (2020), for example, questions the existence of a single universal definition of success in language learning and emphasizes the importance of examining how success is constructed in particular contexts. Similarly, Bao (2023) argues for a more nuanced understanding of silence in English language pedagogy, challenging simplistic assumptions that equate speech with engagement and silence with passivity.

The concept of the "ideal EFL learner" therefore requires reconsideration. A learner who speaks frequently is not necessarily more attentive, cognitively engaged, or successful than a learner who listens carefully, observes interaction, reflects before responding, and contributes selectively. From this perspective, the central question should not be simply how much students speak, but how they participate in learning. This shift provides the conceptual foundation for examining silent engagement as a potentially meaningful dimension of classroom participation.

2.2 Silence, Participation, and the Extroversion Bias in EFL Classrooms

International research has increasingly demonstrated that classroom silence is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a simple absence of participation. In EFL classrooms, silence may be associated with linguistic difficulties, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, personality, cultural expectations, classroom interaction, teacher behaviour, or task-related factors. It may also coexist with attention, reflection, observation, and other forms of engagement.

Pratolo, Gustriani, Bao, and Priadi (2023), in a qualitative case study of adult EFL learners at a private university in Indonesia, investigated the factors underlying students' lack of verbal participation. Their findings identified a range of factors associated with student silence, including difficulties with vocabulary and comprehension, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and classroom-related factors. This study is important because it demonstrates that silence is multidimensional and cannot automatically be explained by a lack of motivation or interest in learning.

Similarly, Pratolo, Sakti, and Bao (2024) examined student silence in an Indonesian vocational high school and identified a combination of personal, linguistic, psychological, and contextual factors influencing students' silence. Their findings reinforce the importance of examining the circumstances in which silence occurs rather than treating silence as a fixed characteristic of a particular type of learner.

Research has also demonstrated that silence may be closely connected to the social and cultural organization of classroom interaction. Al-Ahmadi and King (2022), in their study of female Saudi Arabian learners of English, examined patterns of reticence in university EFL classrooms and showed that learner silence is a complex phenomenon shaped by multiple factors. Their work is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates that silence in EFL classrooms must be interpreted within its broader sociocultural and interactional context rather than through universal assumptions about what constitutes appropriate participation.

At the same time, recent research has questioned the assumption that the solution to classroom silence should always be to increase the amount of student talk. Peng (2024), examining Chinese EFL students, explicitly focuses on the relationship between silence and participation and argues for a more balanced approach to classroom engagement. The study highlights the importance of addressing the factors that inhibit students' participation while also recognizing that meaningful engagement cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the quantity of speech.

This perspective is particularly significant for the present study. A learner may be silent because of anxiety, limited proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, or disengagement. However, another learner may remain silent while listening attentively, processing information, observing peer interaction, preparing a response, or deciding when and how to contribute. These behaviours may appear identical from the outside, even though they represent very different forms of classroom involvement.

The distinction between silence as disengagement and silence as engagement is therefore central. Silence may be unproductive when it results from exclusion, confusion, severe anxiety, or a lack of involvement in the learning process. However, it may also be productive when it allows learners to process information, reflect on different perspectives, formulate ideas, monitor their language, or make deliberate decisions about participation.

The relationship between silence and classroom interaction is also important. Pham and Hoang (2024) examined students' and teachers' perceptions of silence in an EFL

classroom and found that students and teachers may interpret silence differently. The study highlights the influence of cultural and social norms, classroom management, language proficiency, and teacher perceptions on the interpretation of student silence. Such findings suggest that silence is not simply a learner behaviour; it is also a phenomenon whose meaning is constructed through classroom interaction.

This has important implications for classroom dynamics. A quiet learner may contribute to classroom interaction without dominating the floor. Through attentive listening, observation, selective intervention, and thoughtful responses, such a learner may support more balanced interaction. Silence may also create space for other students to speak and may prevent classroom discourse from being monopolized by the most verbally confident learners. In this sense, silent engagement can contribute to classroom dynamics indirectly, even when its contribution is not immediately visible.

The emerging literature therefore supports a more differentiated understanding of classroom participation. Participation should not be reduced to the amount of speech produced by a learner. Rather, it may involve multiple forms of engagement, including speaking, listening, observing, reflecting, writing, and responding selectively. The pedagogical challenge is consequently not to eliminate silence but to understand its meaning and to create conditions in which both speech and silence can support learning.

2.3 Participation, Reticence, and Communication in the Algerian EFL Context

Compared with the growing international literature on classroom silence, research in the Algerian EFL context has more frequently examined related issues through the concepts of willingness to communicate, communication confidence, classroom environment, and anxiety. These studies provide important contextual evidence concerning the factors that influence students' oral participation.

Sifi (2024), for example, investigated willingness to communicate among EFL learners at Tlemcen University. The study examined the relationship between learners' communication confidence, the classroom environment, and their willingness to enter into classroom discourse. Its findings indicated that both communication confidence and the classroom environment were associated with learners' willingness to communicate. This research is relevant to the present study because it demonstrates that students' participation cannot be understood solely as a stable individual characteristic; classroom conditions and learners' perceptions of the interactional environment also play an important role.

Similarly, Beddiar (2023), in a study of first-year EFL students at the University of Mohamed Cherif Messaadia in Souk Ahras, investigated the effects of anxiety on students' willingness to communicate in the classroom. The study examined the causes of anxiety and their relationship with students' readiness to participate orally. This line of research is particularly relevant to the study of silence because anxiety and fear of negative evaluation may influence whether students choose to speak, remain silent, or participate selectively.

These Algerian studies contribute to an understanding of the barriers that may restrict students' oral participation. However, they primarily approach limited participation through the concepts of willingness to communicate and anxiety. Consequently, the absence of speech is generally understood in relation to the factors that prevent or reduce oral participation.

What remains insufficiently explored is whether some forms of silence may also represent meaningful engagement. A student who does not volunteer an answer may nevertheless be following the lesson attentively, processing information, reflecting on a question, observing how peers respond, or preparing a contribution. Similarly, a student who

participates infrequently in whole-class discussion may still contribute meaningfully through pair work, written activities, attentive listening, or carefully selected interventions.

The Algerian context is particularly relevant to this issue because classroom participation is shaped by specific educational and sociocultural conditions. Students' previous learning experiences, levels of confidence, language proficiency, classroom relationships, and expectations concerning teacher–student interaction may all influence their willingness to speak. Consequently, silence should not be interpreted through a universal framework. Its meaning must be examined in relation to the specific classroom context and the learner's reasons for remaining silent.

The existing Algerian literature therefore provides an important foundation for the present study, particularly by demonstrating the importance of confidence, anxiety, classroom environment, and willingness to communicate. Nevertheless, the specific contribution of silent engagement to classroom dynamics, learning, and intercultural development remains insufficiently investigated. This constitutes an important area for further research.

2.4 Global Citizenship Education, Intercultural Dialogue, and Silent Engagement

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) provides a valuable framework for rethinking classroom participation and learner engagement. UNESCO (2015) conceptualizes GCE through cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural dimensions. The cognitive dimension involves the development of knowledge and critical understanding of global issues; the socio-emotional dimension involves empathy, respect for diversity, and a sense of belonging to a common humanity; and the behavioural dimension concerns responsible and ethical action.

These dimensions challenge a narrow understanding of participation based exclusively on frequent verbal expression. Global citizenship requires learners to engage with different perspectives, question assumptions, understand diversity, and respond responsibly. Such processes may involve speaking, but they also require listening, reflection, perspective-taking, and the ability to consider alternative viewpoints before responding.

Intercultural dialogue, which is central to GCE, is therefore not simply an exchange in which individuals compete to express their opinions. Meaningful dialogue also depends on attentive listening and the willingness to understand perspectives different from one's own. From this perspective, silence may sometimes provide an important space for reflection. A learner who listens carefully before responding may demonstrate respect for another perspective and may avoid immediate reactions based on misunderstanding or prejudice.

Silent engagement may therefore contribute to the socio-emotional dimension of GCE. Through observation and attentive listening, learners may develop greater awareness of difference and become more sensitive to how others express their perspectives. Similarly, reflection before responding may contribute to more responsible forms of classroom communication.

This perspective also offers a fresh understanding of classroom dynamics. Rather than viewing the classroom as a space in which participation is measured primarily through the quantity of speech, it can be understood as an interactional community in which different forms of engagement complement one another. More verbally active learners may initiate discussions and articulate ideas, while quieter learners may listen, observe, reflect, synthesize information, and contribute at carefully chosen moments.

Such a perspective does not romanticize silence. Silence may also reflect anxiety, confusion, linguistic difficulty, exclusion, or disengagement. The pedagogical task is therefore to interpret silence contextually rather than automatically assigning it either a

positive or negative meaning. Teachers need to consider students' involvement in tasks, written work, peer interaction, attentiveness, and learning outcomes when interpreting silence.

Taken together, the reviewed literature indicates that the relationship between learner personality, classroom silence, participation, and Global Citizenship Education remains insufficiently understood, particularly in the Algerian EFL context. Although previous research has examined these dimensions individually, limited attention has been paid to how they intersect within classroom interaction and how less verbally visible forms of engagement may relate to intercultural understanding, empathy, respect for diversity, and responsible participation. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between learners' personality-related dispositions, their patterns of silence and participation, and teachers' interpretations of these behaviours in relation to GCE-related competencies. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of classroom participation that recognizes meaningful engagement beyond the frequency of verbal output.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining questionnaires and classroom observations to explore the interplay between silence, personality-related orientations, and participation in EFL classrooms. It follows an exploratory rather than a correlational approach, as it does not seek to establish statistical relationships between variables, but rather to understand how these elements are perceived, interpreted, and experienced within classroom contexts. A mixed-methods design allows the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The research was conducted at the Department of English, Batna-2 University, during the academic year 2024–2025.

3.1 Participants and Sampling

The study involved two participant cohorts: 36 third-year undergraduate EFL students and 15 university EFL teachers. The students were recruited through convenience sampling from an accessible third-year EFL cohort. They were selected because their several years of university-level EFL experience provided them with sufficient linguistic and academic experience to participate in classroom interaction, discussion, reflection, and collaborative activities. The same 36 students completed the questionnaire and were subsequently observed during regular classroom activities, enabling the comparison of their self-reported experiences with their observed participation and silent behaviours.

The 15 EFL teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in university-level EFL teaching. All completed the teacher questionnaire, while five teachers and their respective classrooms were purposively selected for classroom observation, with consideration given to variation in teaching experience and classroom practices. This sampling strategy enabled the study to combine students' self-reported experiences and teachers' perceptions with contextualized observations of naturally occurring classroom interaction, silence, and participation.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

3.2.1 Questionnaires

The study used two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students, to examine perceptions of the "ideal learner," classroom silence, participation patterns, and competencies related to GCE. Both quantitative Likert-scale items and open-ended questions were included to capture measurable trends as well as nuanced personal perspectives. Items were adapted from validated instruments, including the Reticence Scale (Keaten & Kelly, 2000), the

Student Engagement Instrument (Appleton et al., 2006), and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000). These adaptations allowed the study to explore beliefs about silence, reflective engagement, personality traits, and intercultural awareness while maintaining alignment with previously validated tools.

Both questionnaires were structured into four main sections. The first collected background information, including age, gender, level of study (students), and years of teaching experience (teachers). The second focused on beliefs about ideal learners, with items such as "A good EFL learner should speak a lot in class" and "Listening and reflecting are also important signs of participation," linking personality traits and learning styles with participation. The third section addressed classroom silence, including statements such as "Silence often means students are thinking" and "In my culture, being quiet in class shows respect," exploring psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors behind silent behaviour. The fourth section targeted GCE-related attitudes, with items such as "Good learners show empathy and respect for different opinions" and "Listening carefully helps understand cultural differences." Open-ended questions invited participants to elaborate on their views, for example: "In your opinion, what does a 'good learner' look like?" and "What does silence mean to you in the classroom?" The teachers' version included additional items concerning their interpretation of student silence, such as "My students remain silent because…"

The validity and reliability of the questionnaires were addressed through several complementary procedures. First, the instruments were adapted from questionnaires previously developed and used in empirical studies, providing a strong theoretical and methodological basis for item selection. However, because the present study was conducted in a specific Algerian university EFL context, the items were carefully reviewed and modified to ensure their relevance to the research objectives and target participants. Before the main administration, the questionnaires were piloted with 10 students and 3 teachers drawn from the same populations as the final participants but excluded from the study sample. The pilot phase allowed the researcher to evaluate the clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance of the items, as well as the suitability of the response scales and instructions. Feedback from the pilot participants helped identify ambiguous wording and possible difficulties in interpretation, leading to minor revisions aimed at improving the clarity and consistency of the instruments. The exclusion of pilot participants from the final sample prevented duplication of responses and maintained the independence of the dataset. In addition, the revised questionnaires were reviewed by two experienced university EFL teachers with expertise in language teaching, EFL pedagogy, and classroom interaction. Their evaluation focused on the extent to which the items reflected the objectives of the study, particularly in relation to learner participation, classroom silence, engagement patterns, and communicative behaviours. Their comments and suggestions were considered in refining the final versions of the instruments. These procedures provided evidence of content and face validity and contributed to improving the overall consistency and appropriateness of the questionnaires.

3.2.2 Classroom Observation

Classroom observations were conducted to examine how silence, participation, and engagement manifested in real-time classroom interactions and to complement the questionnaire data by providing insights into actual classroom practices. The same cohort of 36 students who completed the student questionnaire was observed across five different courses taught by five teachers. Observing the same students across multiple instructional contexts enabled the study to examine whether patterns of silence and participation remained relatively consistent across contexts or varied according to differences in teachers, course content, classroom activities, and interactional demands. The researcher conducted the

observations as a non-participant observer to minimize interference with natural classroom dynamics.

Two sessions were observed in each of the five courses, resulting in a total of ten observation sessions. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes, corresponding to the regular duration of a classroom meeting, for a total of approximately 15 hours of classroom observation. The observations were documented in real time using a structured observation grid and accompanying field notes. No audio or video recordings were used.

Informed by previous research on classroom interaction and learner silence (Cheng, 2002; King & Harumi, 2020; Tsui, 2001), the observation grid was designed around five analytical dimensions: verbal participation (e.g., volunteering answers, responding to questions, and contributing to discussions); types and possible functions of silence (e.g., reflective pauses, waiting for others, hesitation, or observable withdrawal from activities); teacher responses to silence (e.g., waiting, prompting, rephrasing, supporting, redirecting, or moving on); observable engagement behaviours (e.g., note-taking, reading, following instructions, nodding, hand-raising, and task-related gestures); and interactional behaviours associated with politeness, deference, and modesty (e.g., waiting for others to finish and refraining from interruption). The coding framework used to operationalize and systematically analyse these observational categories is provided in Appendix A. These categories were treated as analytical classifications of observable behaviour rather than direct measures of students' psychological states, and silence was interpreted in relation to the surrounding classroom context and subsequent verbal or non-verbal participation. Field notes complemented the observation grid by recording the classroom atmosphere, group interactions, significant episodes of silence, and spontaneous behaviours not captured by the predetermined categories (Emerson et al., 2011).

3.3 Procedure and Data Analysis

The analysis followed a convergent mixed-methods logic in which questionnaire and observational data were first analysed independently before being integrated through a structured comparative procedure. The aim was not to establish statistical relationships between the two datasets but to systematically examine how findings from the questionnaire and observation grid related to one another through convergence, divergence, and complementarity.

Closed-ended questionnaire items were analysed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages, to identify general response patterns. Open-ended questionnaire responses were analysed thematically through repeated reading, initial coding, and the grouping of recurring meanings into broader themes. Coding was guided by the research questions while remaining open to meanings emerging from participants' responses. The emerging categories were then organized according to the main analytical concerns of the study, including the functions of silence, participation, learners' engagement, and perceptions of classroom interaction.

The observational data collected through the observation grid were analysed using descriptive frequency counts and qualitative content analysis. Before coding, operational definitions were established for the main observational categories to ensure consistency in their application across the observed sessions. The predefined categories were systematically applied to relevant classroom interactional episodes, and frequencies were calculated for observable patterns related to verbal participation, types of silence, teacher responses, and engagement behaviours. Silence was not interpreted as direct evidence of learners' internal states; rather, its possible function was inferred only through observable indicators, the

immediate classroom activity, the interactional context, teacher mediation, and subsequent verbal or non-verbal participation.

Four principal categories of silence were used as analytical classifications: cognitive/reflective silence, respectful/interactional silence, anxious/hesitant silence, and disengaged silence. These categories were treated as interpretive frameworks rather than fixed psychological labels, and they were applied only when supported by observable contextual evidence. Since classroom behaviours may involve multiple functions simultaneously, categories were not considered mutually exclusive. When available evidence did not allow a sufficiently clear interpretation, the episode was retained as a descriptive observation rather than assigned to a predetermined category.

Several procedures were adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of the observational analysis. First, the same observation protocol and category definitions were applied consistently across all observation sessions. Second, an audit trail was maintained, including completed observation grids, field notes, category definitions, and records of interpretive decisions. Third, coding decisions were repeatedly reviewed across the dataset to identify inconsistencies and ensure comparable treatment of similar behaviours. Fourth, interpretations were examined against multiple contextual indicators, including classroom activities, teacher responses, subsequent participation, and questionnaire findings. This process of triangulation helped avoid attributing meanings to silence based on isolated behaviours. Additionally, discrepant evidence was retained to acknowledge the complexity and context-dependent nature of classroom silence.

Following the separate analyses of the questionnaire and observation grid data, the two datasets were integrated through a structured comparative analysis using a joint display approach, a recognized strategy in convergent mixed-methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). A comparison matrix was developed to align the findings from both datasets according to four shared analytical dimensions: (1) the meaning and functions of silence, (2) forms of classroom participation, (3) teacher interpretation and response to silence, and (4) GCE-related interactional practices (see Appendix B). The questionnaire data and observation grid data were mapped onto these common dimensions to examine patterns of agreement, difference, and extension between the two forms of evidence.

Within this integration framework, convergence was identified when questionnaire responses and observation grid findings revealed similar patterns or interpretations. Divergence was established when participants' reported perceptions or experiences differed from the behaviours and interactional patterns recorded through classroom observations. Complementarity was identified when one dataset provided additional contextual or explanatory information that enriched the interpretation of the other. Thus, the integration process relied on systematic comparison rather than statistical correlation, allowing the study to develop a more comprehensive understanding of silence as a context-dependent classroom phenomenon shaped by learners' perspectives, observable engagement, and teacher mediation.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study, organized around the key constructs of students' and teachers' beliefs, classroom silence, participation patterns, and attitudes toward GCE. Quantitative results from the questionnaires are first reported, followed by qualitative insights from open-ended responses and classroom observations. Finally, triangulated evidence is summarized to highlight consistencies and discrepancies between reported beliefs and actual classroom practices.

4.1 Students' Questionnaire Findings

4.1.1 Beliefs about the Ideal Learner

Third-year students valued both oral participation and reflective engagement, suggesting a nuanced understanding of what it means to be an effective learner. Most students agreed that speaking in class is important (68%), recognizing the role of active participation in demonstrating comprehension and contributing to discussions. However, an almost equal proportion (62%) emphasized listening and thoughtful reflection as essential indicators of learning. Open-ended responses revealed that these students often view a "good learner" as someone who balances speaking with careful observation and critical thinking. This perspective highlights an appreciation for reflective engagement, where students recognize that learning is not only demonstrated through verbal contributions but also through the ability to process, analyze, and respond thoughtfully to classroom interactions. Such responses suggest that these students are developing a mature understanding of classroom participation, one that values both interaction and introspection.

4.1.2 Students' Perceptions of Classroom Silence

The questionnaire findings indicate that students viewed classroom silence as having cognitive, affective, and social functions. The reported reasons for silence are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Students' Reported Functions of Classroom Silence

Reported function or cause of silence	**Percentage**
Cognitive processing or reflection	56%
Anxiety or fear of making mistakes	52%
Respect for teachers or peers	38%
Disengagement or lack of interest	12%

As shown in Table 1, cognitive processing was the most frequently reported reason for silence (56%), suggesting that students often use silence to process information, organize their thoughts, and prepare their contributions.

Anxiety-related silence was reported by 52% of students, suggesting that fear of making mistakes or negative evaluation may inhibit participation, even when students have relevant knowledge or ideas. Thus, silence should not automatically be interpreted as a lack of understanding or willingness to participate.

Respect for teachers or peers was reported by 38% of students, suggesting that social and cultural norms also influence decisions to remain silent and shape classroom participation.

Only 12% of students associated silence with disengagement, suggesting that silence is more often linked to cognitive, affective, or social factors than to disinterest. Overall, the findings show that students perceive silence as a complex form of participation that may serve reflective, emotional, or social functions.

4.1.3 Personality and Classroom Engagement

The relationship between students' personality orientations and their reported forms of classroom engagement is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Students' Personality Orientations and Forms of Classroom Engagement

Personality orientation	***Percentage of participants***	***Reported form of engagement***	***Percentage within group***
Introverted/ reflective	54%	Frequent verbal participation	22%
Introverted/ reflective	54%	Listening, note-taking, and non-verbal engagement	78%
Extroverted	46%	Regular verbal participation and active discussion	68%

As shown in Table 2, 54% of the participants identified as introverted or reflective, while 46% identified as extroverted. Among the introverted/reflective students, only 22% reported frequently speaking in class, whereas 78% engaged through attentive listening, note-taking, or non-verbal signals such as nodding and gesturing. In contrast, 68% of extroverted students reported regular verbal participation, including volunteering answers and actively joining discussions.

The open-ended responses reinforced these patterns:

- "I like to listen and write notes before I talk so I know my answer."
- "I like to say my ideas in class. I feel more confident when I speak."

Overall, these findings suggest that personality primarily influences **how** students participate rather than their overall level of engagement. While extroverted students tend to participate more visibly through verbal contributions, reflective students may demonstrate meaningful engagement through listening, note-taking, observation, and non-verbal responses.

4.1.4 Students' Attitudes towards GCE

The questionnaire findings concerning students' views on empathy, respect, intercultural understanding, and reflective listening are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Students' Views on Empathy, Respect, Intercultural Understanding, and Reflective Listening

Statement	**Students who agreed or strongly agreed (%)**
Showing respect for different opinions is an important characteristic of a good learner.	81%
Empathy is important in classroom interactions.	76%
Intercultural awareness is important in classroom interactions.	69%
Remaining quiet while listening carefully helps students understand others' perspectives.	64%
Thoughtful observation helps students engage respectfully in discussions.	58%

As shown in Table 3, a strong majority of students valued empathy, respect, and intercultural understanding as important dimensions of classroom interaction. Respect for different opinions received the highest level of agreement (81%), followed by empathy (76%) and intercultural awareness (69%). These findings indicate that students associate effective learning not only with academic performance or active verbal participation but also with the ability to interact respectfully and understand different perspectives.

The results further show that many students connected reflective silence with these interpersonal and intercultural competencies. Specifically, 64% reported that remaining quiet while listening carefully helped them better understand others' perspectives, while 58% indicated that thoughtful observation supported respectful engagement in discussions. This suggests that silence may function as a form of attentive and reflective participation rather than simply indicating passivity or disengagement.

The open-ended responses further support these findings:

- "I listen quietly to think about what others think before I answer."
- "I try to understand my classmates, and being quiet sometimes helps me."

These responses illustrate how students perceive silence as a means of listening, reflection, and perspective-taking. Overall, the findings suggest that silent behaviours, particularly reflective listening and thoughtful observation, can contribute meaningfully to the development of competencies associated with global citizenship. Classroom engagement, therefore, should not be understood exclusively in terms of verbal participation, as quieter forms of interaction may also promote empathy, respect, intercultural understanding, and constructive participation in classroom discussions.

4.2. Teachers' Questionnaire Findings

4.2.1 Teachers' Beliefs about the Ideal Learner

Teachers generally emphasized the importance of balancing oral participation with reflective engagement. A majority (72%) indicated that effective learners should actively contribute to class discussions, demonstrating that verbal participation is considered a key aspect of classroom engagement. Similarly, 68% highlighted the importance of careful listening and thoughtful reflection, suggesting that silent, cognitive engagement is also valued as an essential component of learning.

These findings indicate that teachers conceive of the "ideal learner" as one who can both speak and reflect. Verbal contributions are important, but they must be accompanied by attentive listening and considered responses. This perspective underscores the view that learning involves not only active participation but also cognitive processing of information. In practical terms, teachers' beliefs may inform pedagogical practices such as allowing wait-time, prompting reflective discussion, and encouraging thoughtful responses, thereby fostering a classroom environment that values both expressive and reflective forms of engagement.

4.2.2 Teachers' Interpretations of Student Silence

Teachers identified several reasons for student silence, reflecting cognitive, social, and affective dimensions. Anxiety or fear of making mistakes was the most frequently cited explanation, with 60% of teachers indicating that students often remain silent due to worry or concern about being judged. This suggests that affective factors play a major role in shaping classroom participation.

Disengagement, reported by 50% of teachers, also emerged as a significant factor, indicating that some students may remain silent because of a lack of interest or motivation. Cognitive processing, noted by 40% of teachers, reflects the view that students sometimes remain quiet to think carefully or organize their ideas before speaking. Finally, cultural or polite silence, observed by 30% of respondents, indicates that respect for the teacher or peers also influences student behavior, though less frequently than other factors.

Overall, these findings suggest that teachers perceive silence as a multifaceted behavior. While fear and disengagement are significant barriers to participation, cognitive and socially motivated silence also occur, demonstrating that silence is not always negative but can serve reflective or respectful purposes. Recognizing these different motivations can help educators respond appropriately, fostering classroom environments that support both expressive and thoughtful forms of engagement.

4.2.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Silence and GCE

Teachers' responses indicate that reflective silence in the classroom can play an important role in developing GCE. A majority of teachers (70%) associated attentive listening and reflective silence with empathy, noting that students who pause before responding often demonstrate consideration for others' perspectives. Similarly, 65% linked silent behaviors to respect, seeing them as a way for students to engage thoughtfully with both peers and teachers. Additionally, 60% of teachers viewed silence as a sign of intercultural awareness, reflecting students' careful attention to differing viewpoints and classroom dynamics.

Open-ended responses reinforced these patterns. For example, one teacher noted:

- "Some students remain silent because they are carefully considering the question before answering, which shows empathy toward their peers' ideas." Another commented:
- "Silence can indicate respect for both the teacher and classmates, allowing students to engage thoughtfully without interrupting." A third added:
- "By listening quietly, students often become more aware of different perspectives, which supports intercultural understanding."

Although cultural or polite silence was less frequently reported as a reason for remaining quiet (30%), teachers emphasized that when it does occur, it has considerable educational value, promoting respect, empathy, and intercultural awareness.

These findings suggest that teachers perceive reflective silence as an active and meaningful form of participation, rather than as mere passivity. Silence allows students to process information, consider others' viewpoints, and respond thoughtfully, supporting behaviors such as empathy, respect, and intercultural sensitivity. In this sense, quiet moments in the classroom are not unproductive; instead, they foster reflective engagement and contribute to the development of competencies aligned with global citizenship.

Overall, teachers' perceptions highlight that silence can be a deliberate, constructive strategy that enhances both cognitive and interpersonal aspects of learning, encouraging students to engage in thoughtful, socially aware, and culturally sensitive ways.

4.3 Classroom Observation Findings

4.3.1 Patterns of Classroom Participation

Observations of classroom interactions revealed a pronounced imbalance in verbal participation. A small proportion of students (10%) consistently dominated discussions, frequently responding to questions and initiating contributions. Meanwhile, 50% of students spoke less frequently but remained actively engaged through non-verbal behaviours such as note-taking, attentive listening, nodding, and other gestures. The remaining 40% displayed minimal visible engagement, often observing passively without contributing verbally or through noticeable non-verbal cues.

These patterns indicate that student engagement manifests in multiple, sometimes indirect, forms. Although a minority of students contributed verbally on a regular basis, the

majority demonstrated active involvement in ways not immediately apparent through speech alone. Non-verbal engagement, including reflective listening and gestural responses, suggests ongoing cognitive processing and attentiveness. Furthermore, silent students frequently participated during group tasks or reflective activities, indicating that the form of engagement can vary according to task type and classroom context.

Taken together, these findings highlight that verbal contributions represent only one dimension of classroom engagement. Recognizing and valuing non-verbal and reflective behaviours is essential for a comprehensive understanding of student participation and learning dynamics.

4.3.2 Types and Functions of Observed Silence

The distribution of the different types of silent behaviour identified during classroom observations is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Observed Types and Functions of Classroom Silence

Type of silence	**Approximate proportion of coded episodes**
Cognitive/reflective	50%
Respectful/interactional	45%
Anxious/hesitant	25%
Disengaged	10%

Note. Percentages represent descriptive coding frequencies rather than mutually exclusive categories. A single interactional episode could display more than one function of silence; consequently, the percentages may exceed 100% when combined.

Cognitive silence was the most frequently observed form (50%) and occurred when students paused to process information, organize their thoughts, consult materials, or prepare a response. Respectful silence accounted for 45% of the coded instances and was associated with attentive listening, waiting for another speaker to finish, and avoiding interruption. Anxiety-related silence was observed in 25% of instances and involved reluctance to respond or withdrawal following an invitation to speak. Disengaged silence was the least frequent form (10%) and was characterized by sustained inattention or withdrawal from the ongoing activity.

Cognitive and respectful silence were particularly visible during complex questions, discussions, and collaborative tasks. These observations suggest that silence may support information processing, response preparation, and consideration of alternative perspectives. Overall, the findings indicate that classroom silence is not necessarily a sign of disengagement but may represent different cognitive, social, and affective forms of participation.

4.3.3 Teacher Responses to Student Silence

Observational data revealed that teachers employed a variety of strategies to respond to student silence. Quantitatively, wait time was observed in approximately 85% of cases, prompting in 60%, and rephrasing questions in 45% of instances.

Qualitative observations provided further insight into how teachers interpreted and mediated silence. Some teachers treated silence as hesitation or uncertainty, offering prompts or hints to encourage verbal participation. For example:

• When a student remained quiet after a comprehension question, the teacher asked, "Can anyone think of an example from the text?" to guide the student toward an answer.
• In another instance, a teacher rephrased a complex question: "How would you explain this idea in your own words?" allowing students additional time and clarity to respond.

Other teachers appeared to recognize silence as reflective engagement, allowing extended pauses without interruption. For example:

• During a group discussion, a teacher remained silent for several seconds after posing a question, giving students time to process and formulate thoughtful answers.
• In a debate activity, the teacher observed quietly as students listened to peers' arguments before contributing, indicating respect for reflective participation.

These findings suggest that teachers actively mediate classroom silence using strategies that both encourage verbal participation and accommodate reflective, thoughtful engagement. Observational evidence highlights that teacher responses are sensitive to context and type of silence, reinforcing the idea that silence can serve as both a cognitive and socially meaningful component of learning.

4.3.4 Observable Indicators of Engagement

Classroom observations showed that many silent students remained actively engaged through non-verbal behaviors. Approximately 55% of students who spoke less often were involved through nodding, note-taking, and collaborating with peers during group tasks. These behaviours appeared across different activities, including discussions, debates, and reflective exercises. Examples included:

• Nodding or making eye contact to show attention.
• Taking notes to organize ideas before speaking.
• Collaborating with peers through gestures or brief clarifications without speaking aloud.

These observations indicate that silence does not necessarily mean disengagement. Non-verbal cues provided clear signs that students were attentive and processing information, suggesting that silent students can participate meaningfully in class.

4.3.5 Observed Alignment with GCE-Related Practices

Classroom observations highlighted that silent students often engaged in behaviours reflecting core GCE competencies, such as empathy, respect, and intercultural awareness. These students demonstrated attentive and respectful listening, carefully waiting for their turn to speak and showing consideration for peers' perspectives. Such behaviours were particularly evident during group discussions, debates, and collaborative tasks, where thoughtful engagement was necessary for effective interaction.

Illustrative examples include:

• Students paused after peers spoke, signaling attention and providing time to process ideas before responding.
• Nods, smiles, slight head tilts, eye contact, and hand gestures (e.g., lightly raising a hand or pointing to materials) were frequently used to acknowledge classmates' contributions and show engagement.

- During group problem-solving, some students refrained from immediately offering answers, instead observing and integrating different viewpoints before contributing thoughtfully.

These observed behaviours aligned closely with students' self-reported emphasis on empathy and intercultural understanding, indicating that reflective, non-verbal participation can support the development of GCE-related competencies. Reflective silence allowed students to process information, consider diverse perspectives, and contribute thoughtfully, fostering a collaborative and inclusive classroom climate.

Overall, the findings suggest that silence can serve as a strategic and meaningful mode of participation, supporting reflective thinking and active engagement while reinforcing empathy, respect, and intercultural awareness in classroom interactions.

4.4 Triangulation of Questionnaires and Observation Findings

The triangulation of the questionnaire and observational findings revealed a complex relationship between reported perceptions and observed classroom practices. The analysis was organized around three forms of relationship between the datasets: convergence, divergence, and complementarity. These relationships were examined across five shared analytical dimensions: verbal participation patterns, the meanings and functions of silence, teacher responses to silence, indicators of student engagement, and interactional behaviours related to respect, politeness, and Global Citizenship Education.

Convergence was identified where participants' reported perceptions were supported by corresponding patterns in classroom observations. This was particularly evident in relation to the importance of listening and reflection. Students' reported emphasis on these forms of engagement was reflected in observed behaviours such as attentive listening, note-taking, sustained attention, and delayed but relevant contributions. Similarly, students' reported recognition of respect for different opinions, empathy, and intercultural awareness found partial observable counterparts in behaviours such as allowing others to contribute, listening attentively, avoiding interruption, and responding thoughtfully to different perspectives. Although these observed behaviours cannot be taken as direct evidence of the acquisition of GCE competencies, their convergence with students' reported dispositions suggests that meaningful classroom participation may extend beyond frequent verbal production.

Divergence emerged when reported perceptions differed from observed practices or when students' and teachers' interpretations of silence differed. Students most frequently associated silence with cognitive processing and reflection, although anxiety and fear of making mistakes were also significant factors. Teachers, in contrast, were more likely to interpret silence as an indication of anxiety or disengagement. Observations revealed evidence consistent with both perspectives: some silent students demonstrated attentive listening, note-taking, and other indicators of engagement, whereas others displayed limited visible involvement. Silence therefore did not correspond consistently to a single function. Divergence was also evident in relation to verbal participation. Although both students and teachers generally recognized the importance of active classroom participation, observations revealed that verbal contributions were unevenly distributed, with a relatively small group of students dominating classroom interaction while others participated less frequently. This contrast suggests that the reported value placed on participation does not necessarily translate into equitable patterns of actual classroom participation.

Complementarity was identified when one dataset provided explanatory or contextual information that could not be captured by the other. The questionnaires provided access to students' and teachers' subjective interpretations of silence, participation, and

engagement, while the observations demonstrated how these phenomena unfolded in actual classroom interaction. For example, teachers' reported interpretations of silence were examined alongside their observed responses to silent students, including allowing additional processing time, encouraging verbal participation, or redirecting questions. The observations therefore added an interactional dimension to the teachers' self-reported perceptions. Similarly, students' reported emphasis on listening and reflection was complemented by observations of less visible forms of engagement, including note-taking, attentive listening, non-verbal responsiveness, and delayed contributions. At the same time, the observations also revealed instances of minimal visible involvement, thereby preventing the questionnaire findings from being interpreted as evidence that silence necessarily represents productive engagement.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that classroom silence cannot be equated automatically with a lack of participation. However, the contribution of the present study lies beyond reaffirming the established multidimensionality of silence. The integrated evidence suggests that the pedagogical meaning of silence is relational rather than intrinsic: the same absence of speech may represent cognitive processing, respectful listening, anxiety, or disengagement depending on what accompanies it, the interactional context in which it occurs, and how the interaction develops. This distinction is important because it shifts the analytical question from whether silence is "good" or "bad" to how its meaning can be responsibly inferred in context. In line with Cheng (2002) and King and Harumi (2020), students often used silence to process information; however, the present findings further suggest that such an interpretation becomes more defensible when silence is accompanied by observable attention, task involvement, perspective-taking, or subsequent contribution. Silence, therefore, cannot be interpreted independently of the broader pattern of participation within which it occurs.

Personality also appeared to shape the visibility and form of participation rather than determine whether students were engaged. Introverted or reflective students tended to rely more on listening and other non-verbal forms of engagement, whereas extroverted students participated more visibly through verbal interaction. This finding has a pedagogical implication that extends beyond simply advising teachers to "include quiet students": participation criteria themselves may reproduce an extroversion bias when speech frequency is used as a proxy for competence or engagement. The study therefore suggests that teachers should interpret verbal and non-verbal evidence together and provide multiple routes into participation. In this sense, Tsui (2001) and Baktash and Chalak (2015) help explain the relationship between personality and participation, while the present study extends that discussion by linking the visibility of participation to the ethical question of who is recognized as an "ideal" learner. A more inclusive EFL pedagogy should consequently recognize that meaningful engagement may involve speaking, listening, reflecting, preparing, and responding at different stages of an interaction.

Affective factors, especially anxiety and fear of making mistakes, remain significant obstacles in language education. The triangulated findings are particularly revealing here because they complicate the tendency to celebrate silence as reflective engagement. Students' own accounts foregrounded cognitive processing, whereas teachers more frequently interpreted silence through anxiety and disengagement. Observations supported both perspectives. This divergence indicates that teachers cannot reliably infer the function of silence from its outward appearance alone. It also suggests that a pedagogical response based exclusively on increasing student talk may be counterproductive: teachers must first distinguish between silence that requires supportive access to participation and silence that is already functioning as attentive reflection. The study thus contributes a practical interpretive

principle: silence should neither be valorized automatically nor pathologized automatically. Rather, its meaning should be examined in relation to the learner, the task, the interaction, and the behaviour that accompanies or follows it.

The strongest conceptual contribution of the study concerns the relationship between silent engagement and GCE. The findings do not demonstrate that silence by itself produces empathy, respect, or intercultural awareness. Rather, they indicate that particular forms of silent engagement, including attentive listening, allowing others to finish, considering alternative viewpoints, and delaying an immediate response, can constitute observable interactional practices compatible with GCE. This distinction is significant because it connects a usually invisible dimension of participation with the socio-emotional, ethical, and intercultural dimensions of global citizenship. While previous research has mainly examined silence as a cognitive, affective, or interactional phenomenon, the present study shows how its interpretation can also be connected to the quality of learners' engagement with difference and with the perspectives of others. The novelty therefore lies in treating silence not as a GCE competence in itself, but as a possible interactional condition through which GCE-related practices may become visible. This perspective challenges the assumption that meaningful citizenship-oriented participation must necessarily be immediate, frequent, and verbally expressed.

Teacher mediation emerged as the mechanism that could either preserve or transform the pedagogical value of silence. Wait time, prompting, and rephrasing were not equally meaningful strategies: their value depended on whether they opened space for a considered contribution or treated every pause as a problem requiring immediate correction. Teachers who allowed reflective pauses appeared to recognize silence as part of the learning process, whereas supportive prompting could help anxious students enter the interaction. This finding refines earlier discussions of teacher response by suggesting that effective pedagogy requires differentiated mediation rather than a single participation norm. Inclusive participation is therefore not achieved by replacing speech with silence, or silence with speech, but by creating interactional conditions in which learners can move between listening, reflection, and contribution. For EFL pedagogy, this implies that teachers should avoid using the frequency of speech as a sufficient indicator of engagement and should provide varied opportunities for participation, including individual reflection, written preparation, pair and small-group interaction, and delayed responses.

The integrated design of the study also offers an important methodological contribution. Bringing together students' perceptions, teachers' interpretations, and classroom observations made it possible to examine not only what silence meant to participants but also how it functioned within actual classroom interaction. The convergence and divergence among the datasets were themselves analytically meaningful. Students' emphasis on cognitive processing, teachers' stronger association of silence with anxiety and disengagement, and observations that supported elements of both perspectives demonstrate the limitations of relying on a single source of evidence. Triangulation therefore did more than confirm findings across instruments; it revealed the distance that may exist between learners' experiences, teachers' interpretations, and observable classroom practices. This provides a more nuanced basis for understanding participation and strengthens the study's contribution to research on silence in EFL classrooms.

Overall, the study proposes a context-sensitive understanding of classroom participation. Its central implication is that participation should be interpreted through an interactional chain: observable behaviour provides evidence, classroom context gives that evidence meaning, and teacher mediation influences what happens next. Within this chain, silence may support reflection and perspective-taking, conceal anxiety, or signal

disengagement. The "ideal EFL learner" should therefore not be defined by a fixed quantity of speech or by extroversion-centred behaviours. A more inclusive model recognizes that meaningful participation may be visible, delayed, selective, verbal, or non-verbal, while still requiring teachers to investigate the conditions that make each form of participation possible. This perspective extends existing work on silence by connecting the interpretation of participation to the broader educational question of whose ways of engaging are recognized as legitimate and whose are overlooked. For GCE-oriented EFL pedagogy, the implication is particularly important: classrooms should not merely produce more vocal learners, but should cultivate learners capable of both expressing their perspectives and listening thoughtfully to those of others.

6. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have implications for theoretical understandings of classroom participation, EFL pedagogy, educational policy, and future research.

Theoretically**,** the study contributes to a broader understanding of classroom participation by challenging the idea that active participation is mainly demonstrated through frequent verbal contribution. The findings suggest that silence should not be viewed as a fixed behaviour with a single meaning. Rather, its meaning depends on the classroom situation, the learner's behaviour, and the interaction in which it occurs. By showing that silence may involve reflection, attentive listening, respect, anxiety, or disengagement, the study supports a more inclusive view of participation. It also extends discussions of the "ideal EFL learner" by questioning models that associate successful learning mainly with confidence, verbal fluency, and extroversion. Furthermore, the study highlights that some forms of silent engagement, such as listening carefully, considering different perspectives, and allowing others to contribute, may reflect practices consistent with GCE.

Pedagogically**,** the findings suggest that teachers need to interpret silence carefully rather than immediately considering it a sign of a lack of interest or a lack of ability. Silent learners may be engaged in ways that are not immediately visible through speech. Therefore, classroom participation should include different forms of involvement, such as listening, reflection, preparation, and delayed contribution. Teachers can support more inclusive participation by providing sufficient wait time, using supportive questioning, and offering different opportunities for students to express their ideas, including individual reflection, pair work, and small-group activities. The findings also highlight the importance of teacher mediation in creating classroom environments where both verbal and non-verbal forms of engagement are valued.

At the policy level**,** the study suggests the need to reconsider how participation and engagement are defined in EFL curricula, assessment practices, and teacher education programmes. When verbal contribution becomes the main indicator of involvement, learners with more reflective or less visible participation styles may be overlooked. Broader definitions of participation could contribute to more equitable classroom practices and encourage teachers to recognize diverse ways of engaging in learning.

Finally, and for future research**,** this study opens new directions for examining silence and participation across different educational and cultural contexts. Further studies could include larger samples, longitudinal designs, multiple observers, and video-based classroom analysis to explore how silent engagement changes over time and how it is interpreted by teachers and learners. Comparative research across different EFL settings could also provide deeper insights into how cultural and educational expectations shape learners' participation.

7. Conclusion

The study has shown that classroom silence is not a stable indicator of either engagement or disengagement. Its meaning emerged through the relationship between observable behaviour, classroom context, and teacher mediation. Some silent episodes involved processing, attentive listening, perspective-taking, and preparation for later contribution, whereas others reflected anxiety or withdrawal. The study's central contribution is therefore not the simple claim that silence can be meaningful, a finding already established in the literature, but the demonstration that its pedagogical significance must be interpreted contextually and comparatively across learner perceptions, teacher interpretations, and observed interaction.

This perspective challenges the traditional model of the "ideal EFL learner," which tends to privilege verbal fluency, confidence, and extroversion. The findings suggest that participation should be understood as a range of visible and less visible practices rather than as a single scale measured by speech frequency. Reflective listening and selective contribution may support interactional practices associated with empathy, respect, and intercultural awareness, but silence should not be romanticized as inherently beneficial. The educational task is to recognize when silence creates space for reflection and perspective-taking and when it signals a need for additional support or access to participation.

The study is limited by its relatively small sample, convenience and purposive sampling, reliance on one university context, and the absence of audio or video recordings. The observational classifications are context-bound interpretations rather than direct measures of students' internal psychological states, and the findings should therefore not be generalized beyond comparable settings without caution. Future research could use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal observations, multiple coders, and video-based interactional analysis to examine how forms of silence develop over time and across contexts. Comparative studies could further explore how educational and cultural norms influence the interpretation of participation. In practical terms, teachers are encouraged to provide sufficient wait time, use alternative participation formats, and avoid interpreting silence automatically as either disengagement or reflective competence.

In conclusion, the study argues for a shift from asking how much an EFL learner speaks to asking how participation is being enacted, interpreted, and enabled. The silent learner is neither necessarily passive nor automatically exemplary. By reading silence in context and recognizing multiple routes into meaningful interaction, educators can challenge the myth of a single ideal learner and foster more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive EFL classrooms. Such a shift is relevant beyond the Algerian setting because it questions the assumption that one culturally dominant model of visible participation can serve as a universal measure of learning and global-mindedness.

Declaration on Generative AI Use. During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT only for grammar and language correction, proofreading, and improving academic style. No AI tool was used to generate original content, conduct analysis, or develop arguments.

Ethical Declaration. This study involved university students and EFL teachers as research participants and was conducted for academic research purposes during the 2024–2025 academic year. The study did not involve audio or video recording, and no personally identifying information is reported in the article. Classroom observations were conducted as non-participant observations during regular classroom activities. The information collected through the questionnaires and classroom observations was used solely for the purposes of this research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Classroom Observation Coding Scheme*

Main Dimension	Code	Category	Operational Definition / Coding Criteria
1. Verbal Participation	VP-A	Voluntary Answer	Student responds, comments, or contributes without being directly nominated by the teacher.
	VP-R	Response to Teacher	Student provides a verbal response following a teacher question or invitation.
	VP-P	Peer Contribution	Student interacts verbally with classmates during discussion or collaborative work.
	VP-L	Limited Verbal Participation	Student rarely or never contributes verbally during observed activities.
2. Silence: Possible Functions	S-CR	Cognitive/Reflective Silence	Observable pause associated with thinking, processing information, reading, note-taking, or preparing a response.
	S-RI	Respectful/Interactional Silence	Silence associated with listening, waiting for another speaker, avoiding interruption, or allowing turn-taking.
	S-AH	Anxious/Hesitant Silence	Observable hesitation, reluctance, avoidance of response, or difficulty initiating participation after an invitation.
	S-DI	Disengaged Silence	Silence accompanied by observable withdrawal, lack of attention, or absence of involvement in the ongoing activity.
3. Teacher Response to Silence	TR-W	Wait Time	Teacher allows sufficient time for students to think before expecting a response.
	TR-P	Prompting	Teacher encourages participation through hints, follow-up questions, or encouragement.
	TR-R	Reformulation/Scaffolding	Teacher modifies or clarifies questions to facilitate student participation.
	TR-N	Nomination	Teacher selects a specific student to answer or participate.
	TR-M	Moving On	Teacher continues the activity without addressing the silence.

4. Observable Engagement	EN-AT	Attentive Engagement	Student follows the activity through eye contact, attentive posture, or active listening.
	EN-NT	Note-taking/Material Use	Student takes notes, reads, or consults learning resources.
	EN-TS	Task Engagement	Student participates in assigned classroom tasks or group activities.
	EN-NV	Non-verbal Participation	Student shows engagement through gestures, facial expressions, nodding, or other non-verbal responses.
5. GCE-related Interactional Practices	GCE-RE	Respectful Exchange	Student listens to others, acknowledges contributions, or respects different viewpoints.
	GCE-EM	Empathetic Interaction	Student demonstrates support, consideration, or sensitivity toward peers.
	GCE-TT	Turn-taking/Politeness	Student waits for others to finish and avoids interrupting.
	GCE-CI	Collaborative Interaction	Student cooperates, negotiates meaning, and contributes constructively to group interaction.

Appendix B: *Data Comparison Matrix*

Shared Analytical Dimensions	**Questionnaire Data**	**Observational Data**	**Relationship Between Findings (Convergence / Divergence / Complementarity)**	**Integrated Interpretation**
1. Meaning and Functions of Silence				
2. Forms of Classroom Participation				
3. Teacher Interpretation and Response to Silence				
4. GCE-related Interactional Practices				