

Decoding EFL learners' in-class silence

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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Classroom management → Handling activities
 - ❑ Classroom silence → hurdle to activity involvement
 - ❑ Schultz, 2012: silence should be considered as “a form of participation” and equally studied alongside talk.
- the need to study reasons behind students' reticence to deal with it adequately

BACKGROUND

- Schultz (2012): a conscious selection of students “resistance or assent”
- Baurain (2011)
“speaking silence” vs. “silent silence”.
→ Silence can be the indicator of both engagement and disengagement

BACKGROUND

- Causes of classroom silence – Asian learners
 - low language proficiency
 - psychological factors
 - Personality
 - lesson
 - teacher-related causes

(Cheng, 2000; Liu, 2005a; Liu, 2005b, Ghavamnia & Ketabi, 2013; Tong, 2010; Agazadeh & Abedi, 2014)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are Vietnamese EFL students' reactions towards teachers' in-class speech acts?
2. What the reasons behind Vietnamese EFL students' in-class silence as reported by those students?

METHODOLOGY

- Participants: **107** first-year students majoring in English
- Instruments:
 - ✓ Questionnaires: 107 participants - framework based on speech acts survey designed by Jules (2003)
 - ✓ Journals: 14 participants
- Data analysis: statistical and content analysis method

FINDINGS

- 1. What are Vietnamese EFL students' reactions towards teachers' in-class speech acts?**

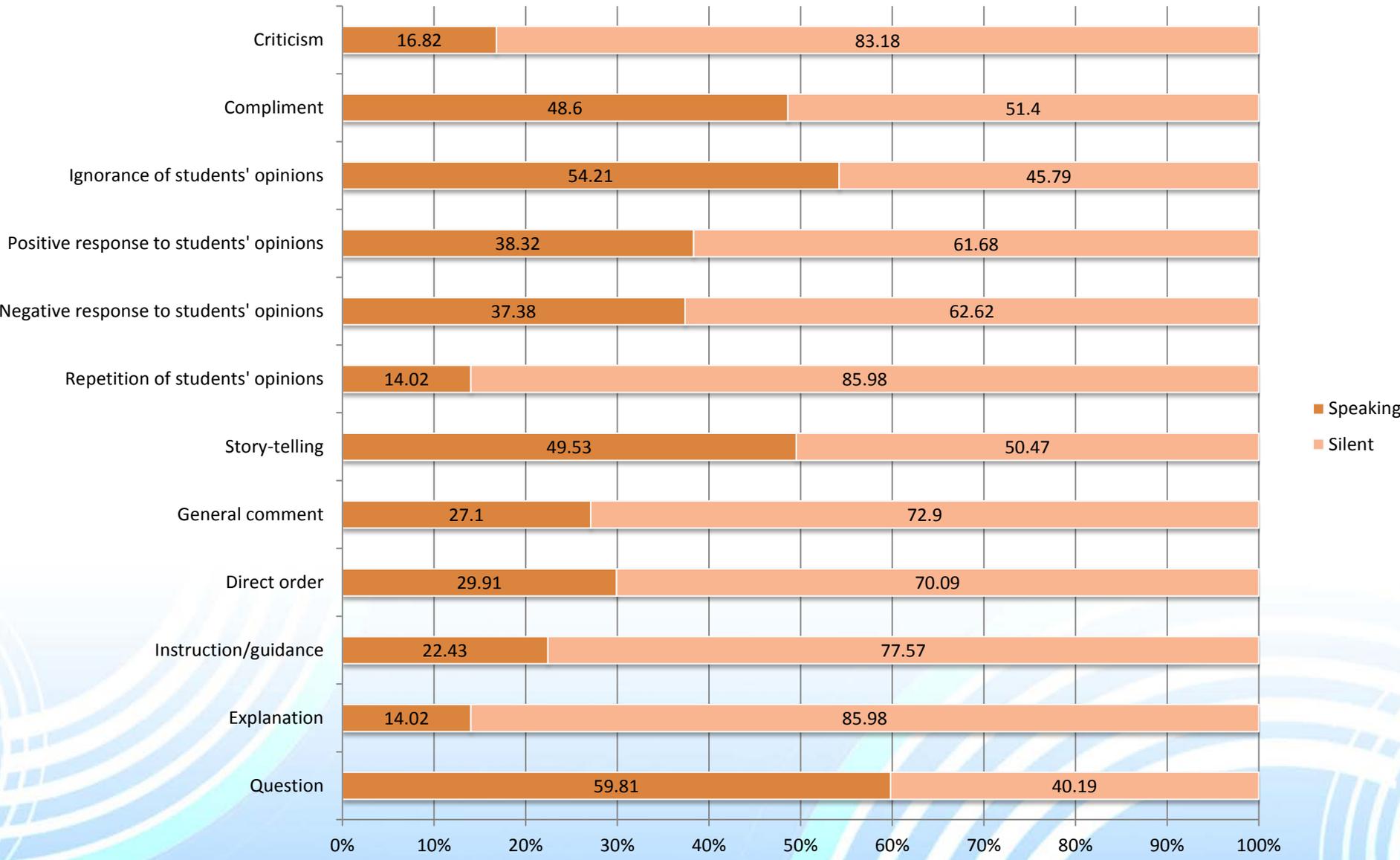


Figure 1. Participants' reactions towards teachers' speech acts addressing the whole class

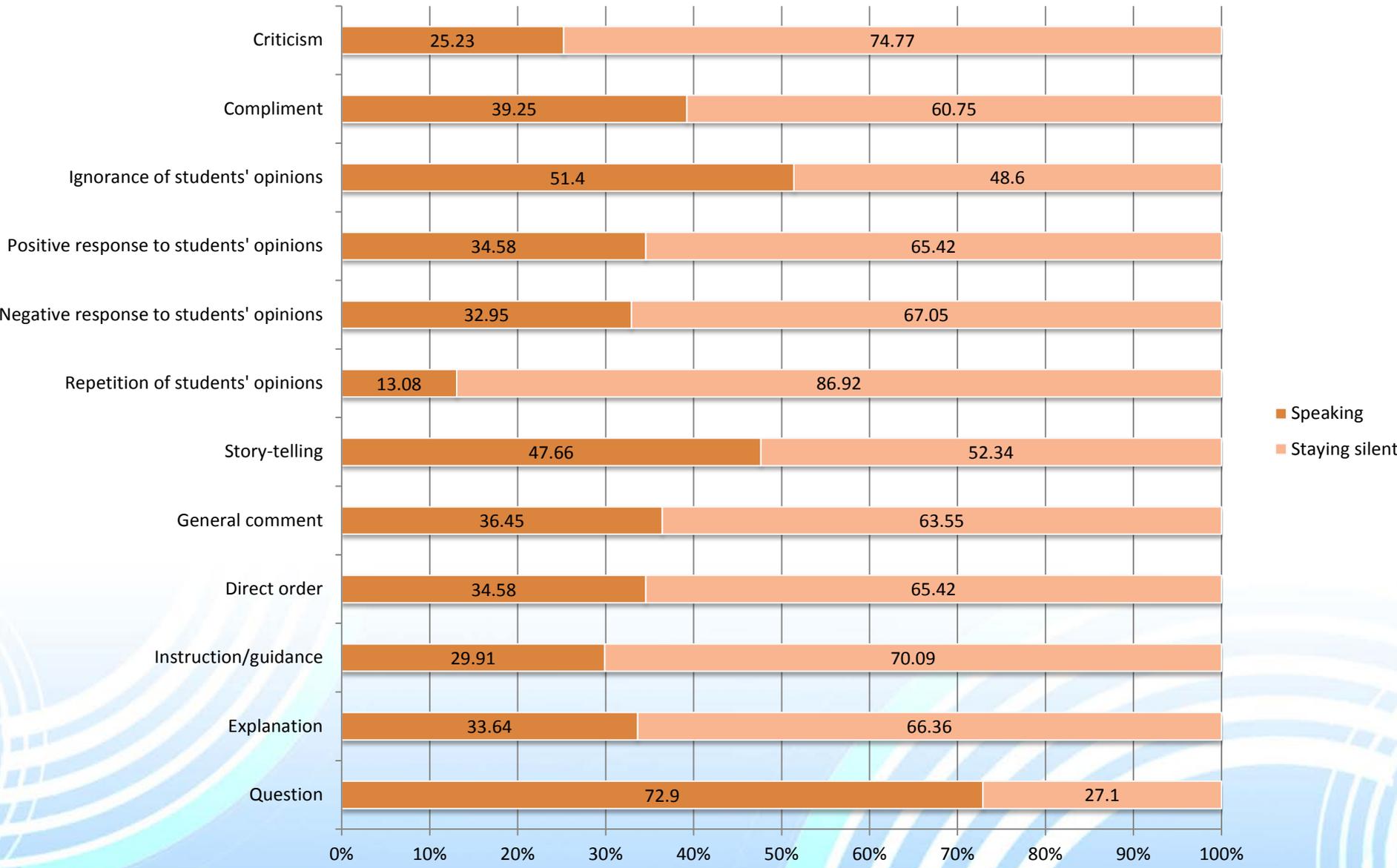


Figure 2. Participants' reactions towards teachers' speech acts addressing each individual

FINDINGS – QUESTION 1

SPEECH ACTS	TO THE WHOLE CLASS	TO EACH INDIVIDUAL
Question	40.19	27.1
Explanation	85.98	66.36
Instruction/guidance	77.57	70.09
Direct order	70.09	65.42
General comment	72.9	63.55
Story-telling	50.47	52.34
Repetition of students' opinions	85.98	86.92
Negative response to students' opinions	62.62	67.05
Positive response to students' opinions	61.68	65.42
Ignorance of students' opinions	45.79	48.6
Compliment	51.4	60.75
Criticism	83.18	74.77

Table 1. Comparison of students' reactions towards teachers' speech acts between when being addressed in person and when being addressed altogether

FINDINGS

2. What the reasons behind Vietnamese EFL students' in-class silence as reported by those students?

- Quantitative data
- Qualitative data

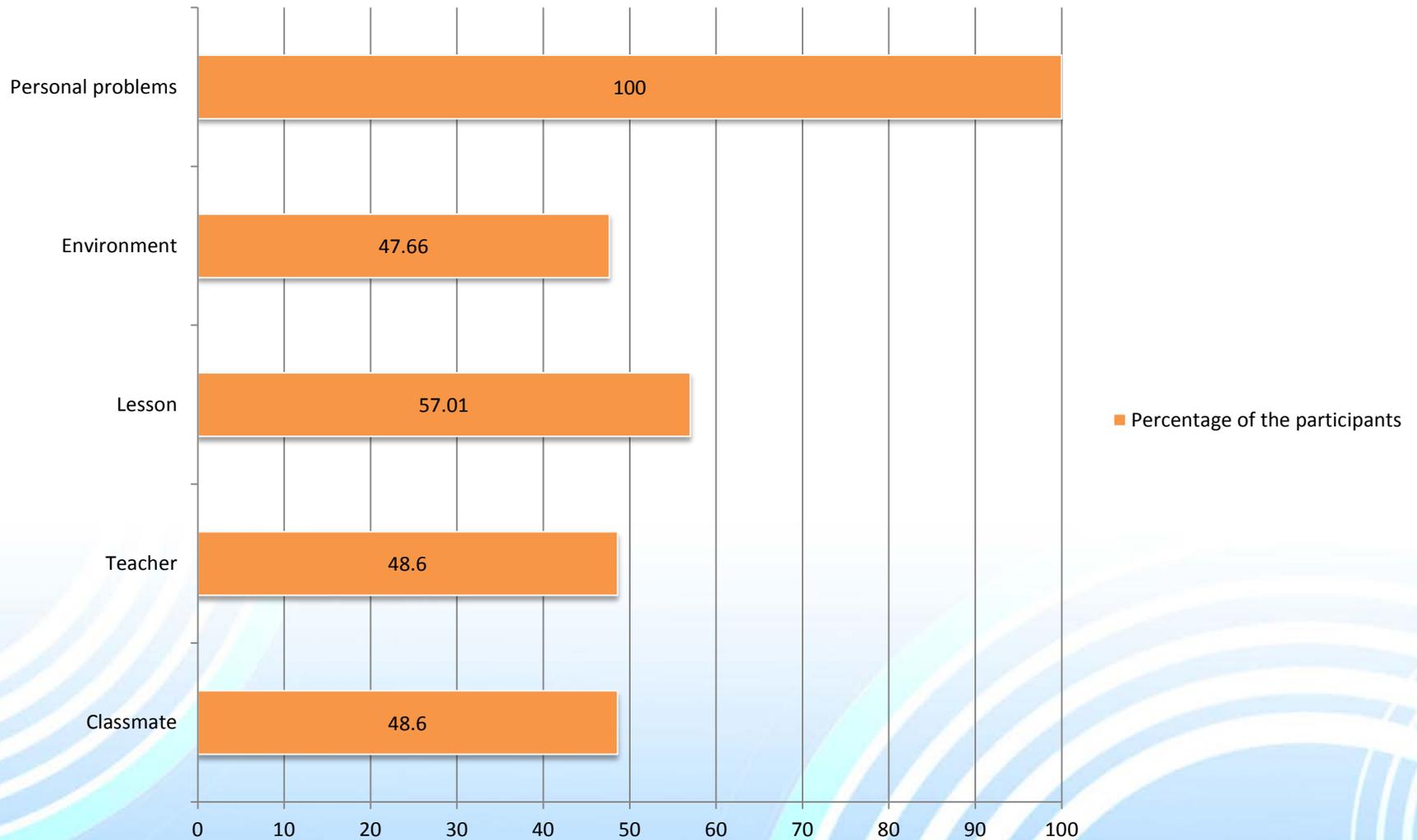


Figure 3. Reasons behind students' in-class reticence



Figure 4. Personal problems-related reasons behind students' in-class reticence

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

□ *Classmate*

- teammates' low proficiency
- reserved counterparts
- classmates' negative attitudes → group conflicts

“Sometimes I looked into their eyes, and I thought no one paid attention to my speaking.” (S.F)

“They didn't speak so I couldn't talk like a strange creature in a silent group.” (S.F)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

Classmate

Teacher

- Supervision: strict – ignorant

“While I was discussing with my friends, teacher X came to our place and listen to my speaking so attentively. I felt so hesitant to continue!” (S.A)

“I just talked when the teacher came to my corner, the first reason was I had nothing to say and I thought that the teacher seemed to ignore me.” (S.F)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

❑ **Classmate**

❑ **Teacher**

- Supervision: strict – ignorant
- Teacher-student interaction

“anyone-can-tell” questions (S.M)

“The teacher may ask me “Why”?” (S.G)

Teacher’s one-way
lecturing
(S.G, I, L)

Teacher’s
“flooding” use of
English (S.I)

Teachers insisted on
giving questions and
calling students to
answer
(S.L, N)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

Classmate

Teacher

Lesson

- Contents
- Activities
- Tasks - Drills

“nothing to ask the teacher or discuss with friends” (S.C)

meaningless activity (S.M)

a lesson full of drills → no chance to raise the voice (S.I, N)

drills → naturally required no oral reaction (S. A, B, C, &L)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

- Classmate***
- Teacher***
- Lesson***
- Personal problems***
 - Personality

not a talkative person
(S.C, G, H, L)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

- ❑ ***Classmate***
- ❑ ***Teacher***
- ❑ ***Lesson***
- ❑ ***Personal problems***
 - Personality
 - Low language proficiency

language proficiency generally were not good enough to understand teachers' instructions (S, I, B, D)

deficiency in lexical resources (S.A, B, M)

Mispronunciation (S.H, M, N, B, D)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

- Classmate***
- Teacher***
- Lesson***
- Personal problems***
 - Personality
 - Low language proficiency
 - Psychological factors

“I feel more comfortable when the whole class speak together, that’s when no one can track my errors.” (S.K)

“When my group did a presentation, I did not say much. The other friend was very good at speaking, so letting her present would contribute to the whole group performance.” (S.M)

FINDINGS – QUESTION 2

- Classmate***
- Teacher***
- Lesson***
- Personal problems***
 - Personality
 - Low language proficiency
 - Psychological factors
 - Other factors: workload, lack of preparation, lack of background knowledge

“I wanted to give the chance to some other friends.” (S.C)

FINDINGS – DISCUSSION

- ❑ The findings harmonized with the literature review
- ❑ Silence may also stem from
 - intention to help their counterparts → a contribution
 - peer effect
 - lessons whose focus is on listening, reading or writing drills → intense engagement
 - teacher's requirements

FINDINGS – DISCUSSION

- Suggestions for teachers
 - grouping students heterogeneously
 - being mindful of their ways of delivering the speech – treating students as individuals
 - Keeping a calm and accepting attitude as well as a satisfaction

Silence is a normal part of classes

CONCLUSION

- ❑ Silence - the principal means of responding → various reasons behind that reticence
- ❑ A reference for dealing with Vietnamese learners in particular and Asian ones in general
- ❑ Suggestions for further studies
 - a bigger scale
 - different types of participants
 - socio-cultural factors
 - effective solutions