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RESEARCH ARTICLE		**The Semiotics of Silence and Non-verbal Communication in Education: A Systematic Literature Review**

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Abstract

Based on foundational semiotic theories including Saussure (1916/1983), Peirce (1931/1955), Kress (2010), and van Leeuwen (2005), this article relies on a systematic literature review to do a semiotic analysis of silence and nonverbal communication in educational settings. The study examines how silence and nonverbal cues play a role as a meaningful sign system that contributes to the functioning of classroom interactions, representation of cultural norms and the constitution of pedagogical practices. The findings of this study demonstrate that silence has many communicative functions, ranging from reflective pauses and cultural respect to subtle resistance. Moreover, nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and posture are used as additional cues to reinforce teacher authority, and encourage student engagement. In addition, the review emphasizes the significance of cultural and contextual aspects in the interpretation of these semiotic signs. Despite the wealth of global research, the Algerian context remains underexplored. Therefore, this study contributes to filling that gap by suggesting semiotically informed pedagogical approaches, and in turn calls for future empirical research, particularly in virtual classrooms and intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

The field of semiotics, the study of signs and meaning-making, has had a long run providing valuable insights into both verbal and non-verbal communication (De Saussure, 1916/1983; Peirce 1931/1955). Within educational contexts, silence and non-verbal communication like gestures, facial expression, constitute a complexity of meaning through which the classroom is shaped. They have been widely explored by scholars, investigating them based on different perspectives. That is to say, while researchers such as Kress (2010) and Van Leeuwen (2005) emphasize the semiotic potential of silence and other non-verbal elements, others, including Hall (1976) and Saito (2010), highlight how the meaning and interpretation of silence can vary across cultural or educational contexts, sometimes leading to miscommunication. As matter of fact, these interpretive differences among researchers disclose the complexity of silence and non-verbal cues in education.

However, despite the extensive studies and thorough investigations on silence and non-verbal communication in the EFL setting, there is a notable gap in research in the Algerian context. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, few studies have examined how silence, as a specific form of non-verbal communication, operates in

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the classroom. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by providing a tentative contribution to understanding how silence and other non-verbal signs are interpreted in educational settings.

Thus, this paper investigates the role of silence and nonverbal cues as semiotic resources in the areas of education, it seeks to clarify how such elements are understood by teachers and students, and how they are employed to generate their educational experiences by synthesizing existing literature and drawing on theoretical frameworks from classical and contemporary semiotics.

1.2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this article is to review and analyse the semiotic dimensions of silence and non-verbal communication in classroom settings. Specifically, the study seeks to:

• Examine the theoretical foundations as far as semiotics of silence and non-verbal communication is concerned.

• Identify and synthesise a list of empirical findings from previous studies discussing cultural, contextual and pedagogical implications.

• Propose future research directions taking into account the transformative character of silence and non-verbal communication by means of physical and virtual learning environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Semiotics in Education

Semiotic theory offers a wide range of tools to analyse the way signs generate meaning (Chandler, 2007). It provides us with significant insights about how verbal and non-verbal signs communicate meaning. Indeed, Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) laid the foundation for analysing meaning as a system of signs, a framework which has since been expanded by scholars to include non-verbal elements such as silence and gestures as meaningful communicative acts (Eco, 1976; Jaworski, 1993), and this was implied by many important figures in the field, such as Saussure (1916/1983) in his dyadic model, which divides the sign into signifier and signified. The signifier refers to the form, word, gesture, and sound which carry meaning, and the signified is the concept or meaning that the signifier refers to. In this regard, Saussure's model helps us in decoding and interpreting the meaning of gestures and silence in educational contexts. For instance, raising hands, gestures, and a moment of silence inside the classroom during the lesson can all convey meaning to the viewer.

Along the same lines, Charles Sanders Peirce (1931/1955) is another figure who developed Saussure's framework and expanded his ideas with his triadic model, which is composed of icon, index, and symbol. In fact, this model allows us to understand that signs stand for something by resemblance, causal connections, and social conventions. Therefore, these perspectives are used to determine how silence and gestures function as communicative signs which can be interpreted in various ways based on different factors such as context, cultural background, and previous knowledge.

Pursuing this further, scholars such as Kress (2010) and Van Leeuwen (2005) enlarged the field of semiotics to focus not only on linguistic forms but also on other communicative modes (visual, temporal, and spatial modes). In this context, they introduced new approaches to multimodality that centre on language's contribution to meaning produced in educational settings not only in its words but also concerning visual, spatial, and temporal modes. According to these approaches, meaning is made through several modes which are not limited to spoken and written forms only but also include body language and body movement, silence duration and classroom layout (Kress, 2010). For example, the arrangement of desks, the organisation of the classroom environment, or the use of gestures to explain or highlight ideas all play an important role. In brief, understanding multimodality plays a cardinal role in the process of decoding messages and using non-verbal signs effectively, which enhances teaching and learning processes.

2.2. Silence as a Semiotic Resource

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Traditionally, silence has been seen as the absence of speech, it is, nevertheless, now recognized as an active element of communication (Jaworski, 1993). In semiotic terms, silence can serve as an index of thought, a sign of respect, or a symbol of dissent (Freire, 1970; Saville-Troike, 1985). For instance, in many East Asian classrooms, silence for long periods of time is ideal to signify reflection and respect (Nakane, 2007), yet it could be understood as disengagement or displeasure in most western class settings (Hall, 1976). Those layered meanings of silence say something to educators about the limitations of the simplistic binary of speech versus no speech.

In recent times, Nguyen (2020) conducted a study about the factors that motivate learners to remain silent in EFL classrooms. He examined 85 English-major students at a foreign language university in Hanoi, Vietnam. The data were collected using a questionnaire and semi- structured interviews. The outcomes of the study demonstrate that lesson content, class dynamics, personal problems, language skills, personality, and teaching methodology are among the main factors which lead to silence. The findings of this investigation help teachers to interpret and understand their students silence to improve learning and teaching processes.

In a more recent study, Feng (2024) explored silence among Asian EFL learners. He used a semi-structured interview to gather data. The results of this study revealed that psychological and linguistic issues, willingness to communicate and problems in turn-taking are among the most important factors of silence in the classroom. In addition, this study shows that silence in education has a negative impact on students' performance in the classroom. The researcher recommended and emphasised participation in the environment of learning to improve language acquisition and learning.

In the same year, Peng (2024) directed another research work about balancing silence and participation among Chinese EFL learners. Actually, this research assesses the balance between silence and speaking in EFL classes. The population of this study incorporates 36 EFL Chinese students at Monash University. The data were collected through interviews via the use of mixed methods which involve qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings of this study demonstrate that lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and cultural factors were among the main causes of silence. The researcher suggested a mistake-sharing method to improve students' engagement and participation, to create a supportive learning environment and to achieve teaching and learning objectives.

2.3. Non-verbal Communication in Classrooms

As stated previously, verbal and non-verbal signs, including silence, play a pivotal role in the field of education. Undoubtedly, decoding these cues of communication is vital for both teachers and learners to understand various types of messages. Silence, for example, can communicate unlimited meanings in the classroom context and can be used as a powerful and useful tool in teaching and learning processes.

Non-verbal communication includes some behaviours such as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, or proxemics (Birdwhistell, 1970; Ekman, 1979). However, these behaviours function as semiotic resources of utmost importance worthy of complementing or even substituting verbal communication. Studies revealed that emotions are conveyed in classrooms via nonverbal cues. These latter are important in transmitting emotions, signalling comprehension, and establishing social hierarchy in the classroom (Knapp & Hall, 2010). In addition, the meaning of these cues is deeply embedded in the norms of the culture, as concluded in research on intercultural communication by Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey (1988).

Pursuing this further, recent studies support the significant role of non-verbal cues in the classroom. In the same vein, researchers claimed that non-verbal communication signs shape interactions and maintain verbal communication. As an illustration, Mehrabian (2017) concluded that 90% of our face- to- face interaction is non-verbal communication. He highlighted the role of non-verbal codes in transmitting messages and communicating meaning. In educational settings, learners often rely on their body language, facial expressions, and gestures to express themselves and show their understanding. Moreover, McNeill (2012) tackled the contribution of gestures in the organisation of ideas, which has an important impact in the cognitive process of learning.

Besides, Burgoon et al. (2016) revealed that the use of non-verbal communication inside the classroom, like positive facial expressions, motivates learners and facilitates their engagement in the learning process. In another important contribution, Hargie (2011) demonstrated how cultural backgrounds affect students' interpretation of non-verbal forms of communication. Therefore, he argued that teachers should understand both verbal and non-verbal cues to maintain an effective successful learning environment.

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2.4. Cultural and Contextual Variations

Hall (1976) and Saito (2010) show clearly that silence and nonverbal cues are understood in a cultural context. Again, this is not a yes or no situation; silence is looked at differently in collectivist societies where people appreciate it as a pause for thought or/and respect. However, in individualist societies, it may be perceived as a lack of contribution (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Additionally, factors such as classroom size, physical layout, and even the medium of instruction (e.g., face-to-face vs. online) alter the dynamics of non-verbal communication (Jewitt, 2008; O'Halloran, 2004). This review highlights the need for context-sensitive interpretations of semiotic data in education.

To explain, classroom environment and the medium of instruction impact non-verbal communication in education. Classroom size and layout affect visibility and interaction; small spaces enhance engagement, while large ones reduce non-verbal impact. Face-to-face vs. online instruction changes how gestures, facial expressions, and silence are used, with online settings relying more on digital cues (e.g., emojis, video gestures). Context matters when analysing non-verbal communication, as meaning shifts based on physical and technological factors.

In recent times, many scholars have underscored the cardinal role of cultural and contextual aspects in non-verbal communication in education. As an example, Anderson (2023) carried out an investigation entitled non-verbal communication as a mediator of intercultural communication (ICC) in English as a second language classrooms. He stated that non-verbal signs shape the cultural background of social connections and interactions, which are very significant in building intercultural communicative competence and communication skills. The researcher claimed that examining non-verbal communication impact in developing intercultural communication skills in EFL classes has often been ignored. Thus, his paper examined 20 English- speaking teachers in Korea. They were interviewed about the use of non-verbal cues in their classes.

The outcomes demonstrated that skilled teachers employed non-verbal communication to understand their students' feelings and avoid conflicts and problems inside the classroom, which helped them build good connections and create culturally diverse classes. On the other hand, unskilled teachers who lacked experience missed non-verbal codes which caused misunderstandings and led to prejudice. Indeed, this research work shed light on the major impact that non-verbal communication plays in developing ICC in educational settings.

Similarly, Šerić (2020) administered a study about the relationship between teacher non-verbal communication and student behaviour. This research aimed to provide insights about the influence and power of teachers' non-verbal codes in classroom dynamics and students' behaviour. In this respect, self-behaviour is assessed through perceiving the match between teachers' and students' self-image, attention, and learning. The sampling of the study was composed of learners who arrived from Italy and Spain. The findings showed that self-image is connected to a teacher's appearance, attention is linked to voice and tone, and learning is related to body movement. The results also indicated that there exist some other differences between Spanish and Italian students in terms of how these relationships work.

2.5. Relevance to the Algerian Educational Context

While this review has drawn extensively from international literature, the theoretical insights bear direct relevance to the Algerian educational setting. Classrooms in Algeria, particularly in EFL contexts, are shaped by traditional pedagogical norms, linguistic diversity, and complex cultural codes that influence communication styles. Silence, for example, is often interpreted by educators as a sign of disengagement or lack of comprehension. However, as Nakane (2007) has shown in the Japanese context, silence may instead signify respect, attentiveness, or reflective thinking. Similarly, Jaworski (1993) emphasized that silence is not simply an absence of speech but a socially and contextually constructed communicative act.

Moreover, Algerian teachers may rely heavily on verbal instruction, often overlooking the pedagogical potential of non-verbal cues such as gestures, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions. As Knapp and Hall (2010) and Mehrabian (1972) argue, non-verbal communication accounts for a significant portion of classroom interaction and is crucial in expressing emotions, regulating discourse, and establishing classroom dynamics. In multilingual classrooms such as those in Algeria where Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English intersect students' non-verbal behaviours and silence may not align with teachers' expectations, leading to misinterpretations and reduced engagement (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

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Understanding these cues through a semiotic lens, as advocated by Kress (2010) and van Leeuwen (2005), enables educators to better interpret student behavior and foster a more inclusive learning environment. While this review does not provide empirical data from Algerian classrooms, it contributes a foundational framework and urges future research to explore how silence and non-verbal communication function in Algerian educational settings particularly in foreign language learning environments.

Through the analysis and examination of the literature review regarding silence and non-verbal communication, it is obvious that various research works have tackled this theme of nonverbal codes and silence in EFL classes. Some studies have focused on the numerous factors that motivate the use of silence and non-verbal signs as communicative tools in education, while others have explored the different attitudes and perceptions, both positive and negative, regarding their impact in educational settings. Taken together, these results offer insightful ideas about non-verbal communication and point to the difficulty of understanding and interpreting non-verbal communication in educational contexts. However, despite the wealth and density of the existing literature, there remains a remarkable absence of research addressing this issue within the Algerian setting. Consequently, the present study aims to fill this gap and contribute to a deeper understanding of this theme in Algerian education in general and foreign language learning more specifically.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Systematic Literature Review Approach

In this study, the methodology employed is a systematic literature review (SLR) on scholarly works that tackle the semiotics of silence and non-verbal communication in education. The review process undertaken is characterised by the following:

• **Database Search:** Databases, including JSTOR, ERIC, GOOGLE SCHOLAR were searched using terms such as "semiotics of silence", "non-verbal communication in education", "classroom semiotics", "cultural interpretations of silence".

• **Includes:** Peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters and conference proceedings published from 1970 up to the present time, which used semiotic frameworks in describing classroom communication.

• **Data extraction:** In order to structure the data from the studied, themes such as Cultural differences, Pedagogical implications, Theoretical frameworks, and Methodological approaches were taken into consideration.

• **The findings:** A thematic synthesis of diverse studies was conducted for analysis in order to bring forth convergent and divergent findings in the literature.

3.2. Limitations

While the review spans multiple decades and cultures, it is limited by the fact that explicitly focused studies on the semiotics of silence in education are unavailable. To fully understand complexities of non-verbal communication in different classroom environments further empirical research is warranted.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Silence as a Multifaceted Communicative Tool

Based on the existing literature, it is revealed that silence in educational contexts is rarely neutral; rather, it is charged with varied meanings. Hence, it can be concluded that silence can serve as:

• **A Reflective Pause:** Giving students time to process information and allowing them the time to get their answers ready (Jaworski, 1993). In addition, a study conducted by Su, Wood and Tribe (2023) concludes that classroom silence strengthens both student engagement along with their reflective and critical thinking development.

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- **A Form of Resistance:** Silence may represent a form of resistance in contexts where there is power imbalance (Freire, 1970). Silence proves to be a delicate way of resisting when inequalities of power exist throughout oppressive social or educational environments. Freire (1970) explains that silence in this context should not be mistakenly perceived as passivity, rather, it might mean that people consciously or unconsciously choose not to conform to dominant power structures.
- **A Cultural Norm:** In many non-Western societies, silence is a sign of respect and an indicator of attentive listening (Nakane, 2007). That is, non-Western societies perceive silent responses as appropriate behavior to show respect instead of awkwardness. According to Nakane (2007) silent behaviour shows respect along with attentiveness as well as politeness that mainly occur between individuals in formal relationships.

In another recent research, Ha and Li (2014) argued that silence functions as a cultural standard which symbolises respect in educational settings and a form of resistance which challenges verbal participation that belongs to traditional teaching methodology.

This underlines the fact that silence must be understood in cultural as well as situational contexts, and that silence is best interpreted by teachers with a more subtle sensitivity to student behaviour. In short, these conclusions consolidate the complex nature of silence in instruction and learning processes, it reveals its potential in reflecting cultural norms and values.

4.2. Non-verbal Communication: Indicators of Engagement and Authority

Non-verbal cues are highly important in classroom interaction. Research by Mehrabian (1972) and Knapp and Hall (2010) concluded that, based on those cues, the following can be explained:

- **Teacher Gestures:** Non-verbal behaviours such as eye contact and body language, can enhance perceived authority and clarity of instruction.
- **Student Cues:** The comprehension level and engagement of students usually get immediate feedback through their facial expressions along with nodding movements when considering associated physical signals. Nevertheless, these cues maybe misinterpreted when cultural differences remain unaddressed properly (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

These insights can be integrated better with multimodal theories (Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005) to decode the meaning carried within the non-verbal interactions.

4.3. The Interplay Between Silence and Non-verbal Cues

The nature of the relationship between silence and non-verbal communication is dynamic. For example:

- **Complementary Roles:** In verbal communication, a pause when mixed with an encouraging smile or a nod, may imply that students are on the right track. In other words, it complements student progress when minor pauses contain non-verbal signals through smiles or nods which indicate their correctness without disturbing their thinking process. The coordinated use of silence with gesturing acts as a support system to build understanding and increase student confidence according to Mehrabian (1972).
- **Contradictory Signals:** Conversely, other forms of negative signals such as silence along with negative non-verbal cues (frowning or closed body posture) can incite disapproval or confusion. As a result, this complexity calls for holistic analysis of classroom interactions which takes into consideration the verbal and non-verbal aspects (Chandler, 2007).

4.5- Intersemiotic Translation and the Pedagogical Semiotics of Silence and Gesture

A crucial yet underexplored aspect of non-verbal communication in educational semiotics is the process of **intersemiotic translation**, a concept first proposed by Roman Jakobson (1959), which refers to the translation of meaning from one semiotic mode to another (e.g., from verbal to visual or gestural). Within the classroom context, silence and gestures can serve as intersemiotic translations of internal cognitive processes or emotional states that are not verbally articulated.

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For instance, when a student furrows their brow while remaining silent, this could signal confusion, contemplation, or disagreement. The silence, paired with the facial expression, forms a composite semiotic act that translates inner uncertainty into observable signs. In this way, the classroom becomes a site of dynamic multimodal communication, wherein silence and gestures do not merely support verbal discourse but often substitute or amplify it (Bezemer & Kress, 2016).

Furthermore, teacher awareness of this intersemiotic interplay is vital. Instructors who can "read" the silent, gestural language of students are better positioned to adjust their pedagogical strategies responsively. Conversely, educators who ignore these semiotic cues may misinterpret silence as lack of engagement, missing opportunities for deeper intervention. As Cope and Kalantzis (2015) argue, contemporary pedagogy must account for transpositional literacy, where students and teachers alike learn to interpret meaning across communicative modes.

In a recent study, Liu and Park (2023) investigated the use of intersemiotic resources in bilingual classrooms in Singapore and found that students often used silence as a tactical mode to mentally translate ideas from their first language into English. Here, silence functioned not as communicative void, but as a semiotic bridge facilitating cognitive and linguistic transfer.

4.5.1. Silence and Power: A Foucauldian Perspective

To enrich the analysis of silence beyond functional roles, it is instructive to draw on Foucault's theory of discourse and power. Silence, according to Foucault (1978), is not the absence of power but a constituent of discursive regimes. In educational settings, silence can be read as an enactment of institutional power where students internalise expectations of compliance and order. In this light, a silent classroom may reflect a Foucauldian "docile body"—a subject trained through the disciplinary mechanisms of the school.

However, silence can also function as a counter-discourse, a form of strategic resistance. As articulated by Mazzei (2007), students, especially from marginalised backgrounds, may use silence as a refusal to engage with dominant discourses that do not reflect their identities or experiences. In this sense, silence embodies a form of semiotic resistance, not unlike what Barthes (1964) called "mythologies"—subversive acts embedded in seemingly neutral gestures.

This insight is critical for educators: a student's silence may not be a pedagogical failure, but an index of deeper tensions within the curriculum or classroom power structures. Recognising this allows for more equitable pedagogical strategies that validate alternative forms of participation.

4.5.2 Affect Theory and the Emotional Semiotics of Silence

Recent advances in affect theory have deepened our understanding of how emotion operates in communicative environments. Scholars such as Massumi (2015) and Ahmed (2014) argue that affects—unconscious intensities that precede cognition—are semiotically rich and often conveyed through bodily cues, including silence.

In classroom contexts, emotional states like anxiety, enthusiasm, or boredom are often conveyed non-verbally. For example, prolonged silence accompanied by a closed posture may indicate affective disengagement. Conversely, brief silences after a question, combined with eager eye contact, may signal thoughtful anticipation. The affective dimension of silence thus calls for what Boler (1999) termed an "empathetic pedagogy", where teachers cultivate the skills to "read" not only what is said but what is felt.

A study by Jang and Kim (2022) found that Korean high school students used silence to manage face-threatening situations in English classes, particularly when afraid of making errors. Their silence was not simply emotional avoidance but an affective strategy to preserve social harmony and self-esteem. This aligns with Hall's (1976) notion of high-context communication, wherein unspoken cues carry significant social meaning.

4.5.3 Silence and Non-verbal Communication in Online Education: Semiotic Shifts

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the semiotics of classroom communication. In virtual learning environments, traditional non-verbal cues—body posture, proxemics, even shared silences—are truncated or

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distorted by the limitations of the digital interface (Hockly, 2021). In platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet, silence becomes more ambiguous: is the student thinking, disconnected, or multitasking?

New semiotic resources such as reaction buttons, emojis, virtual hand-raising, and background choices have emerged as proxies for non-verbal communication. These are not neutral additions but are laden with their own cultural and contextual meanings. As Knox (2022) argues, these affordances represent a new digital semiotic regime that educators must learn to navigate.

Furthermore, the muted microphone—a ubiquitous feature of online platforms—adds another layer of mediated silence. In her autoethnographic work, Soboleva (2022) reflects on how "mic muting" became a new form of ritual silence, regulating turn-taking and delineating private from public space within the digital classroom.

This transformation calls for a re-theorisation of semiotic practices. Traditional models of proxemics (Hall, 1976) or kinesics (Birdwhistell, 1970) must now be adapted to account for mediated embodiment, where gestures, facial expressions, and silences are filtered through digital constraints and opportunities.

4.5.4 Implications for Classroom Design and Embodied Pedagogy

Physical classroom design plays a crucial role in enabling or constraining non-verbal communication. As Van Leeuwen (2005) suggests, space itself is semiotic, it communicates authority, hierarchy, and interactional norms.

For instance, circular desk arrangements foster more democratic exchanges and increase visibility of non-verbal cues, while traditional row structures may reify teacher-centered authority and discourage spontaneous gestural communication. In Algerian classrooms, where rigid layouts are common, these spatial arrangements can silence students both literally and symbolically.

Emerging pedagogical movements such as embodied learning (Shapiro & Stolz, 2019) argue for classroom designs that prioritise movement, gesture, and spatial interaction. These practices are not peripheral but central to meaning-making. Activities such as role-playing, movement-based storytelling, and kinetic vocabulary learning utilise the semiotic power of the body to reinforce cognitive and affective engagement.

4.5.5 The Role of Silence and Gesture in Language Acquisition

From a psycholinguistic perspective, silence and gestures are integral to second language acquisition (SLA). According to McCafferty and Stam (2008), gestures provide external scaffolding for internal language development, especially in early stages of acquisition. Similarly, periods of silence often correspond to the so-called "silent period" in SLA, a phase where learners absorb linguistic input before they are ready to produce output (Krashen, 1982).

In this view, silence should not be pathologized as non-participation, but rather respected as part of the cognitive-linguistic process. A recent experimental study by Hopp & Schmid (2021) found that learners who were allowed silent reflection time before speaking produced more complex syntactic structures in their responses.

In Algeria, where students often navigate multiple linguistic systems simultaneously, this silent cognitive processing is especially important. It enables intra-lingual translation, cognitive chunking, and emotional regulation. Teachers must learn to recognise these silent moments as zones of proximal development, not pedagogical voids.

5- Contextualising the Findings within the Algerian EFL Classroom

The findings from this review, though drawn from diverse international contexts, raise key issues that are highly relevant to Algerian EFL classrooms. Silence, often dismissed as passive disengagement by local educators, may in fact reflect deep-rooted cultural expectations surrounding respect, authority, and linguistic insecurity, particularly in multilingual environments where students are navigating between Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English. Teachers may unintentionally overlook the communicative richness of silence and non-verbal behavior, especially in larger or more formal classroom settings. Furthermore, the non-verbal cues identified in international literature—

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such as facial expressions, posture, and gestures—are equally present in Algerian classrooms but may be filtered through different cultural codes.

For instance, limited eye contact or physical distance may signal politeness or deference rather than disengagement, echoing observations by Hall (1976) and Saito (2010) on high-context cultures. These insights highlight the urgent need for Algerian educators to interpret non-verbal behavior through culturally informed semiotic frameworks and to integrate multimodal awareness into pedagogical practice.

6. Implications of Digital and Virtual Learning Environments

Over the past decade, online education has had an effect on the way silence and non-verbal cues are communicated. In virtual classrooms, the absence of a physical presence involves a shift of focus onto the digital signals (e.g. emojis, reaction buttons) with their own semiotic repertoires (Jewitt, 2008). We propose that more research is needed in this developing area surrounding how digital platforms can impact semiotic processes that involve traditional semiotics and the engagement of students on them.

7. Implications for Educators and Semiotic Theory

1.7. Enhancing Cultural Competence in Pedagogy

Educators should have cultural competence to correctly understand the underlying meaning of silence and nonverbal cues. Pursuing this further, teachers need to grasp cultural norms that define body language signals (Saito, 2010; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) and should adjust their teaching approaches accordingly. To enhance the classroom responsiveness, professional development programs should include the training in semiotic theory and intercultural communication.

7.2. Reframing Silence in Classroom Discourse

When silence is reconceptualised as a positive and strategic pedagogical tool, it has major implications. Teachers can read silence as time for reflection, and critical thinking and should not view it as disengagement (Najafov, 2025). This is an idea that is consistent with constructivist approaches of student agency and deep learning (Freire, 1970; Jaworski, 1993).

7.3. Future Research Directions

With the growth of online learning, further research into the semiotics of digital communication becomes a necessity. Investigating the way virtual environments reshape the roles of silence and non-verbal cues could contribute to developing better theory and practice. (O'Halloran, 2004; Kress, 2010). Longitudinal studies that track changes in semiotic practices over time will further enrich our understanding of these dynamics.

8. Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to review multiple aspects of silence and non-verbal communication in the light of semiotic study as far as the educational context is concerned. The study integrates classical semiotic theories and current multimodal viewpoints to explain the complex roles silence and the non-verbal cues play in the classroom interaction. These factors are far from the simple absences of speech that they might appear to be; rather, they are active, culturally sedimented signals that affect teachers' authority, students' engagement, and the way the learning environment operates. This calls for revisiting pedagogical practices and encourages further empirical research on digital learning spaces.

Additionally, recognising the importance of non-verbal signs and silence can foster the process of learning. Understanding these cues empowers teachers to create responsive and dynamic learning environments and build strong relationships and connections with their students. Indeed, highlighting the role of silence and non-verbal communication in educational contexts opens up new avenues for developing pedagogical practices. Therefore, and given the importance of this topic, further studies are highly recommended to deepen our insight and expand

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our understanding, to broaden our knowledge and increase teachers' awareness of this issue and explore its implications in EFL classes.

This study, while grounded in international literature, also sets the stage for examining silence and non-verbal communication through a semiotic lens within the Algerian EFL context. By highlighting the cultural and communicative significance of these elements, the review invites Algerian educators and researchers to rethink classroom interaction in light of students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and social norms. Future empirical studies within local classrooms are essential to deepen our understanding and tailor pedagogical approaches that align with Algeria's unique educational landscape.

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Acknowledgement

Conflict of Interest

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