

Communicative Inhibitions as a Cultural Lens: Rethinking Student Silence Beyond Anxiety

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Abstract

What causes some students to stay quiet even though they might have something valuable to contribute? This study proposes the communicative inhibition of the foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) framework to shed light on student silence. FLCA has long been recognized as a barrier to participation in classroom activities, yet classroom silence is often considered an anxious response. This response of silence, we argue, is the result of something much broader: culture. Inhibition, as we explain, is self-restraint because of worrying about offending, maintaining social harmony, or social rejection. This explanation is much broader than simply anxiety, which is an emotional response to something. Inhibition relates to cultural rules that shape our interactions. A 33-question survey was administered to 145 Japanese, 68 Indonesian, and 98 Malaysian university students to determine why they often remain quiet in informal conversations. The results showed three main reasons for this silence: Social Sensitivity (being careful not to hurt feelings), Social Rejection (worrying about being judged), and Social Offense (wanting to avoid conflict). Japanese students emphasized Social Sensitivity more, while Indonesian and Malaysian students focused on Social Rejection. This suggests that silence in Japanese classrooms comes from cultural restraint rather than fear. Understanding this can help educators create more culturally sensitive teaching methods that encourage open communication in supportive environments.

Keywords: communicative inhibition, classroom silence, cross-cultural communication, foreign language learning

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Introduction

The question of why some students remain silent in classroom discussions, even when they may have valuable ideas to contribute, has long been a concern in educational research. One widely cited explanation is Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). Introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986), FLCA refers to a specific form of anxiety experienced when learning or using a second language. This type of anxiety can cause students to feel nervous, worry about negative evaluation, and hesitate to participate in classroom interactions. While this framework has been influential in explaining student silence, it may not fully capture the complexity of communicative behavior across all cultural contexts, particularly in many Asian societies, where silence may also reflect culturally appropriate social behavior.

To address this limitation, the present study introduces the concept of communicative inhibition as an alternative lens for understanding student silence. Whereas anxiety primarily refers to an internal emotional state, communicative inhibition emphasizes socially informed self-restraint in communication. Students may choose not to speak not only because of fear or nervousness, but also to maintain social harmony, avoid causing discomfort to others, or prevent social rejection. In cultural contexts where group harmony and interpersonal sensitivity are highly valued, silence may therefore represent adherence to social norms rather than a lack of confidence.

Understanding this distinction is particularly important in multilingual and multicultural educational settings. Some students may remain silent because they feel anxious about their language ability, while others may do so as a culturally appropriate communicative strategy. Recognizing these different motivations may help educators interpret classroom silence more accurately and develop teaching approaches that support diverse communicative styles (Cheng, 2000; Wong, 2004).

Literature Review

Recent research suggests that silence in educational settings should not be understood simply as an absence of speech, but rather as a culturally shaped communicative behavior. In many Asian educational contexts, silence may serve important social functions, such as maintaining interpersonal harmony, showing respect toward teachers or authority figures, and avoiding potential conflict. From this perspective, communicative restraint can be understood as a socially learned practice shaped by cultural norms governing appropriate interaction.

Existing studies have also highlighted the role of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) in shaping student participation in language learning environments. FLCA has been widely used to explain why students may feel reluctant to speak in class due to fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, or concern about making mistakes (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, research also suggests that silence in classrooms cannot always be explained solely by anxiety. In some contexts, students may remain silent not because of fear, but because restraint aligns with culturally appropriate forms of communication (Cheng, 2000; Wong, 2004).

Previous research conducted in countries such as Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia suggests that social expectations and cultural values may also influence students' willingness to speak. However, relatively few studies have examined communicative inhibition across these contexts using a shared methodological framework. To address this gap, the present study investigates

communicative inhibition among university students in Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia using a common questionnaire and comparative analysis. Specifically, the study examines the general characteristics of communicative inhibition among students in these three contexts and explores how these patterns may reflect culturally ingrained values and social norms that shape communication behavior.

Methodology

Questionnaire Survey

Data was collected using the Inhibition Survey Questionnaire developed by Wyatt et al. (1996). The instrument consists of 33 items designed to assess reasons why individuals may withhold sincere opinions across a variety of social and communicative contexts. The first four items of the questionnaire are shown in Table 1, while the complete list of items is provided in Appendix A.

Each item was rated on a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). The instructions accompanying the questionnaire indicated that higher scores reflected stronger agreement with the statement and, therefore, a higher level of communicative inhibition.

Table 1

Sample Items From the Inhibition Survey Questionnaire

Item	Statement
Q1	Saying what is on your mind may harm or damage other people.
Q2	Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for.
Q3	You want to be polite.
Q4	You like everything to go smoothly.

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students from universities in Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

The Japanese sample consisted of 145 students recruited from universities located in the Tokyo and Kansai regions. Most participants were enrolled in engineering-related programs.

The Indonesian sample included 68 undergraduate students majoring in Marketing Management at the State Polytechnic of Malang.

The Malaysian sample consisted of 98 undergraduate students from QUEST International University in Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia. These participants were enrolled in compulsory English-language courses and represented several academic programs, including pharmacy, medicine, business and management, social sciences, and science and technology.

Procedure

The survey was administered online using Google Forms. Participants accessed the questionnaire via a URL and password. The landing page explained that participation was voluntary and anonymous and that no personally identifying information (e.g., names or email

addresses) would be collected. After providing informed consent, participants reported their gender and age range and then completed the Inhibition Survey Questionnaire. Data were collected in 2023.

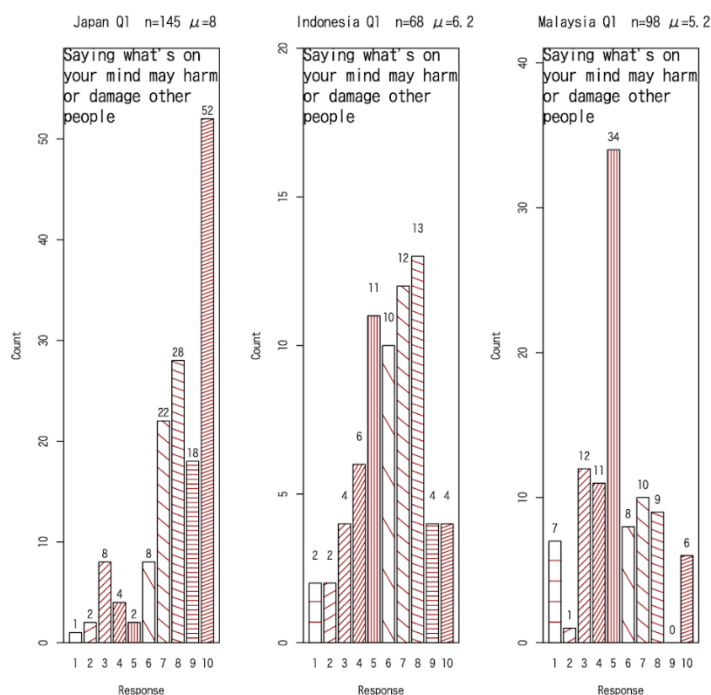
Results and Analysis

Data Screening

All questionnaire items were set as mandatory; however, due to an administrative error, responses to Items 16 and 31 were not correctly recorded for participants in Japan and Indonesia. As a result, subsequent analyses were conducted using the remaining 31 items.

Figure 1 displays a bar graph of raw responses for Item 1. Descriptive statistics for all items are reported in Appendix B.

Figure 1
Bar Graphs for Q1 Showing Results From Each Country



Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Mean total inhibition scores were calculated for each country. To facilitate comparison with Wyatt et al. (1996), scores were computed using a maximum possible total of 310. The descriptive statistics for each country are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Expression Inhibition by Country

Country	Mean	S.D.	N
Indonesia	183	44.1	68
Japan	162	42.5	145
Malaysia	159	35.8	98

Table 3
Expression Inhibition by Country and Gender

Country	Gender	Mean	S.D.	N
Indonesia	Female	182.4	47.6	41
Indonesia	Male	184.0	39.0	27
Japan	Female	172.8	44.2	64
Japan	Male	154.7	38.9	80
Malaysia	Female	160.0	32.6	62
Malaysia	Male	158.5	42.3	34

Internal consistency of the questionnaire was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, $n = 311$). Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated no evidence of non-normality for any country ($W > .98$, $p > .05$).

Country and Gender Comparisons (ANOVA)

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with Country and Gender as factors. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Two-Way Anova by Country and Gender

Source	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	p value
Country	2	26	13.20	7.71	0.00054 ***
Gender	1	6	6.02	3.51	0.06188
Country × Gender	2	6	3.12	1.82	0.16404
Residuals	302	517	1.71	—	—

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of country on inhibition scores, $F(2, 302) = 7.71$, $p < .001$. Neither the main effect of gender nor the country × gender interaction reached

statistical significance at the .05 level. The effect size for the country was small but meaningful ($\eta^2 = .05$).

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test (95% family-wise confidence level) indicated that inhibition scores in Indonesia were significantly higher than those in Japan and Malaysia. At the same time, no significant difference was observed between Japan and Malaysia (see Table 5).

Table 5
Post-Hoc Comparisons by Country (Tukey Hsd Test)

Comparison	Mean Difference	Lower CI	Upper CI	p value
Japan – Indonesia	-0.671	-1.128	-0.215	0.002
Malaysia – Indonesia	-0.764	-1.254	-0.274	0.001
Malaysia – Japan	-0.093	-0.499	0.314	0.853

ANOVA: Individual Comparisons

To examine cross-cultural differences at the item level, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted for each of the 31 questionnaire items. After applying the Benjamini–Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) correction, 21 items showed statistically significant differences across the three countries, while the remaining 10 did not. A summary of the pairwise comparisons is presented in Table 6, and detailed item-level statistics are reported in Appendix B.

Table 6
Summary of Significant Item-Level Differences Between Countries

Country Comparison	Overall Mean Comparison	Higher Country	Number of Items	Lower Country	Number of Items
Japan – Indonesia	162 < 183	Japan	5	Indonesia	15
Japan – Malaysia	162 > 159	Japan	6	Malaysia	6
Malaysia – Indonesia	159 < 183	Malaysia	0	Indonesia	10

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Given the substantial cultural differences observed in earlier analyses and the low factor congruence across regions, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted separately for each country. This approach allowed the identification of country-specific structures of opinion inhibition without imposing assumptions of structural equivalence.

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure indicated adequate sampling adequacy (KMO = .80), and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was highly significant, supporting the suitability of the data for factor analysis. However, the determinant of the correlation matrix was initially too small to permit reliable factor extraction. To address this issue, items that did not reach statistical significance or showed p-values greater than .005 in the individual one-way ANOVAs were removed. After this adjustment, acceptable determinant values ($> .00001$) were obtained for each country.

Inspection of scree plots, parallel analysis, and Very Simple Structure (VSS) criteria suggested that a four-factor solution was appropriate for each dataset. Since the latent dimensions of opinion inhibition were expected to correlate, the analyses employed minimum residual estimation with oblimin rotation. Model fit was evaluated using the root mean square of residuals (RMSR) and off-diagonal fit indices, which indicated satisfactory model fit for all three countries (Table 7).

Factor loadings greater than .50 are presented in Tables 8–10, while factor diagrams showing loadings greater than .30 are provided in Appendix C.

Table 7
Model Fit Indices for Exploratory Factor Analyses

Country	Factors	RMSR	Off-Diagonal Fit
Indonesia	4	0.05	0.99
Japan	4	0.05	0.97
Malaysia	4	0.05	0.97

Table 8
Factor Loadings for Indonesia (Loadings $\geq .50$)

Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	MR4
Q12	0.510			
Q15	0.531			
Q29	0.667			
Q33	0.851			
Q1		0.738		
Q2		0.927		
Q5			0.780	
Q6			0.780	
Q22			0.507	

Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	MR4
Q23				0.663
Q32				0.669

Table 9*Factor Loadings for Japan (Loadings $\geq .50$)*

Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	MR4
Q1	0.856			
Q2	0.950			
Q6	0.554			
Q32		0.738		
Q33		0.550		
Q18			0.812	
Q5				0.565
Q21				0.840
Q23				0.600

Table 10*Factor Loadings for Malaysia (Loadings $\geq .50$)*

Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	MR4
Q5	0.738			
Q6	0.615			
Q21	0.575			
Q23	0.619			
Q18		0.512		
Q27		0.713		
Q32		0.748		
Q1			0.801	
Q2			0.904	

Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	MR4
Q15				0.519
Q22				0.827

Although a four-factor structure emerged across all three countries, item loadings varied across datasets, suggesting culturally specific configurations of communicative inhibition.

Cross-Cultural Interpretation of Factors

Although factor structures varied across countries, three common dimensions emerged: social sensitivity, social rejection, and social offense. Social sensitivity reflects concern about hurting others’ feelings (e.g., Q1, Q2, Q6), while social rejection relates to fear of negative evaluation or exclusion (e.g., Q17, Q18, Q27). Social offense captures concerns about legal or institutional consequences (e.g., Q5, Q21, Q23). Together, these dimensions represent distinct motivations underlying communicative inhibition in social contexts.

Table 11
Factor Comparison Between Three Countries (Cut = 0.5)

Japan 4 factors		Indonesia 4 factors		Malaysia 4 factors	
Factor		Factor		Factor	
F1 Social sensitivity	Q1 Saying what's on your mind may harm or damage other people Q2 Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for Q6 Your language could be offensive to other people.	F1 Social rejection	Q12 Your opinions could be offensive to other people. Q15 You don't want to get involved. Q29 God may punish you for what you say. Q33 People may think you are not 'cool' (or not 'with it').	F1 Social offense	Q5 You could be sued. Q6 Your language could be offensive to other people. Q21 You may be arrested for your opinions. Q23 Police or government authorities may monitor your conversation.
F2 Social rejection	Q17 People may think you don't know what you're talking about. Q18 People you admire and respect may not approve of you.	F2 Social sensitivity	Q1 Saying what's on your mind may harm or damage other people Q2 Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for	F2 Social rejection	Q18 People you admire and respect may not approve of you. Q27 People you want to be like may reject you. Q32 You don't want people to think you are 'odd' or 'different.'
F3	Q12 Your opinions could be offensive to other people. Q13 You may be misunderstood.	F3 Social offense	Q5 You could be sued. Q6 Your language could be offensive to other people. Q22 It's not worth the effort.	F3 Social sensitivity	Q1 Saying what's on your mind may harm or damage other people Q2 Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for
F4 Social offense	Q5 You could be sued. Q21 You may be arrested for your opinions.	F4	Q23 Police or government authorities may monitor your conversation. Q32 You don't want people to think you are 'odd' or 'different.'	F4	Q15 You don't want to get involved. Q22 It's not worth the effort.

As summarized in Table 11, the relative ordering of these factors varied across countries. In Japan, the primary factor corresponded to social sensitivity, followed by two factors related to social rejection, while social offense emerged as the fourth factor. In Indonesia, the first factor reflected social rejection, followed by social sensitivity and social offense. In Malaysia, social offense emerged as the primary factor, followed by social rejection and social sensitivity. A fourth factor also appeared in the Indonesian and Malaysian analyses; however, its interpretation was less clear and may reflect context-specific patterns of communicative restraint.

Discussion

Interpretation of Cross-Cultural Differences

Indonesia

In Indonesia, communicative inhibition appears to be shaped by a combination of social rejection, social offense, and social sensitivity. The results suggest that Indonesian respondents regulate their speech not only out of concern for others' feelings but also due to awareness of social evaluation and potential institutional consequences. In cultural contexts, behavior is often guided by others' expectations and evaluations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As a result, individuals may carefully consider how their words affect relationships and social standing.

Concerns about social offenses were also relatively strong among Indonesian participants. This pattern may be interpreted in light of Indonesia's historical experience with authoritarian governance. During the New Order period (1966–1998), political expression was tightly controlled, and criticism of authority could lead to serious consequences (Aspinall, 2005). Although democratic reforms have expanded freedom of expression, a pattern of communicative caution may persist as part of collective social memory.

Cultural values emphasizing social harmony also help contextualize these findings. The concept of *rukun*, referring to the maintenance of harmonious social relationships, has long been recognized as a central moral value in Indonesian society (Geertz, 1961). Within such a framework, individuals may regulate their speech to avoid disrupting group cohesion. Religious and moral considerations may further shape communication, as public discourse in Indonesia is often informed by ethical and religious norms that guide appropriate social behavior (Hefner, 2000).

Taken together, the Indonesian findings suggest that communicative inhibition reflects culturally embedded norms emphasizing relational harmony, social evaluation, and awareness of authority. In classroom contexts, particularly when communicating in a foreign language, these considerations may contribute to cautious participation rather than a lack of engagement. While Indonesian communicative inhibition appears strongly influenced by hierarchical awareness and historical caution toward authority, patterns observed in Malaysia reflect a somewhat different configuration shaped by multicultural interaction and educational context.

Malaysia

The findings indicate that Malaysian respondents demonstrated communicative inhibition, albeit at lower levels than Japanese and Indonesian students. Social sensitivity, Social Offence, and social rejection emerged as the most salient dimensions. These patterns can be interpreted within Malaysia's sociocultural and educational context.

Malaysia is commonly characterised as a high-context, collectivist society, where indirect communication and relational harmony are prioritized (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2011). In such contexts, individuals are expected to attend carefully to contextual and relational cues. This orientation may heighten social sensitivity, as students monitor their speech to avoid misunderstandings or disruptions to group cohesion. In evaluative classroom environments, these norms may manifest as cautious or restrained participation.

Malaysia's multicultural and multiethnic composition may further encourage communicative caution. As a plural society comprising Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous communities, interaction frequently occurs across ethnic and religious lines (Shamsul, 2001). In such contexts, speakers may exercise restraint to avoid offending, especially when discussing socially sensitive topics. Collectivist orientations and the prioritization of harmony over confrontation may reinforce concerns about Social Offence and rejection (Hofstede, 2011; Ting-Toomey, 1988). Respect for hierarchy and authority also remains socially salient, potentially discouraging open disagreement with instructors in public academic settings (Hofstede, 2011).

Linguistic factors may additionally contribute to inhibition. Although English is widely used in Malaysian higher education, it is not the first language for many students. Communicating in a second language can increase self-monitoring and communication anxiety, particularly in evaluative contexts (McCroskey, 1977). This dynamic suggests that inhibition may reflect not only cultural norms but also language-related performance concerns.

Religious and normative values, particularly among Malay-Muslim students, may further encourage modesty and restraint in public expression (Abdullah, 1996). However, the comparatively lower inhibition observed in Malaysia may reflect broader exposure to multilingual education and sustained intercultural interaction, which can foster communicative adaptability within diverse settings.

Overall, communicative inhibition among Malaysian students appears to reflect culturally situated norms emphasizing harmony, respect, and face management rather than communicative deficiency.

In contrast to the multicultural dynamics shaping communicative restraint in Malaysia, the Japanese pattern appears more firmly rooted in long-standing cultural norms emphasizing interpersonal harmony and sensitivity to others' feelings.

Japan

In Japan, social sensitivity emerged as the most influential factor inhibiting speech. Item Q2, "Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for," ranked highest, followed by Q3, "You want to be polite," and Q1, "Saying what is on your mind may harm or damage other people." These findings indicate that Japanese respondents are primarily concerned with avoiding emotional harm and maintaining interpersonal harmony. In contrast, Q23, "Police or government authorities may monitor your conversation," ranked lowest in Japan but second highest in Indonesia and Malaysia. This cross-national contrast suggests that institutional or legal concerns play a comparatively minor role in communicative restraint among Japanese participants. Rather, inhibition appears to be shaped predominantly by relational considerations.

This tendency may be interpreted in light of Japan's cultural, social, and historical context. The emphasis on social harmony can be traced back to early state formation. In 604 CE, Prince Shōtoku promulgated the Seventeen-Article Constitution, a moral framework for governance whose first article advocates harmony and the avoidance of conflict. Although originally directed at governing elites, this principle of *wa* (harmony) has been widely interpreted as a foundational cultural norm that continues to shape Japanese social interaction. Over time, the

prioritization of harmony has become deeply embedded in social expectations and moral education.

Comparative findings further clarify this pattern. Wyatt et al. (1996) report that among Arab participants, fear of divine punishment (Q29) was a central inhibiting factor, highlighting the regulatory role of religious belief. In Japan, by contrast, secular moral norms—particularly the maintenance of social harmony—appear to serve as the primary regulatory mechanism. From early childhood through secondary education, students socialize through both formal instruction and collective activities that emphasize cooperation, empathy, and group cohesion. Consequently, individuals may unconsciously prioritize others' feelings and the preservation of harmonious relationships when deciding whether to speak.

Postwar socioeconomic developments have further reinforced this orientation. Rapid economic growth generated material prosperity, after which greater emphasis was placed on relational and psychological well-being. Experiences of natural disasters and economic downturns have also reinforced the importance of mutual support and collective resilience (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2019). These societal experiences may have deepened sensitivity to interpersonal relationships as a foundation of social stability.

Geographical and political conditions provide additional context. As an island nation with limited experience of foreign rule, Japan has maintained considerable sociopolitical continuity, apart from the post–World War II occupation period. This continuity has contributed to a relatively homogeneous and group-oriented society in which shared norms regulate behavior. Moreover, prolonged political stability and the absence of severe internal conflict in the postwar era may explain why concerns about governmental monitoring exert comparatively little influence on communicative restraint.

In conclusion, the prominence of social sensitivity as the primary inhibiting factor in Japan reflects the interaction of historical values, moral education, socioeconomic experience, and political stability. Communicative inhibition in the Japanese context is therefore best understood as a culturally embedded orientation that prioritizes relational harmony.

Overall, the findings suggest that communicative inhibition reflects culturally specific patterns across the three countries. In Japan, restraint in communication appears to be primarily guided by concerns for interpersonal harmony. In Malaysia, communicative caution is shaped by multicultural interaction and sensitivity to contextual differences. In Indonesia, inhibition reflects a combination of relational awareness and historical caution toward authority.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Beyond Anxiety: Rethinking Classroom Silence as Communicative Inhibition

The findings suggest that classroom silence cannot be explained solely through Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). While previous research has linked silence to fear of negative evaluation and low confidence (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), the present study highlights the role of culturally grounded communicative inhibition.

Unlike anxiety as an internal emotional state, inhibition reflects socially informed self-restraint. The dimensions identified—social sensitivity, social rejection, and social offense—indicate

that students regulate their speech not only due to anxiety but also in response to concerns about relational harmony, social evaluation, and institutional expectations.

Cross-cultural differences further support this interpretation. In Japan, inhibition is closely tied to interpersonal harmony; in Indonesia, it reflects both relational awareness and sensitivity to authority; and in Malaysia, it is shaped by multicultural interaction and contextual sensitivity. These patterns suggest that silence may function as a culturally appropriate communicative strategy rather than merely a sign of psychological discomfort.

This perspective broadens the interpretation of classroom silence beyond deficit-oriented views, positioning it instead as part of culturally shaped communication practices.

Classroom Implications

The findings of this study also have practical implications for language teaching and classroom interaction. If communicative inhibition is partly rooted in cultural norms, educators should be cautious about interpreting student silence as merely disengagement or a lack of preparation. In some cases, silence may reflect students' efforts to maintain politeness, avoid disrupting group harmony, or prevent potential embarrassment for themselves or others.

Teachers working in multicultural or international classrooms may therefore benefit from creating communicative environments that reduce the perceived social risk of speaking. Strategies such as small-group discussions, collaborative tasks, and supportive feedback can help lower the interpersonal pressure associated with public speaking. These approaches may allow students to participate more comfortably while still respecting culturally shaped communication preferences.

In addition, teachers may consider explicitly discussing participation norms with students. Clarifying that mistakes are acceptable and that diverse perspectives are valued can help create a classroom climate where speaking is perceived as safe rather than socially risky. At the same time, participation policies must remain culturally sensitive and not unintentionally penalize students whose communicative styles emphasize restraint.

Overall, understanding communicative inhibition as both a cultural and psychological phenomenon can help educators interpret classroom silence more accurately. Rather than assuming a single universal explanation, teachers can recognize that participation patterns are shaped by a combination of language proficiency, individual confidence, and culturally informed communication norms.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the questionnaire measured general communicative inhibition rather than classroom-specific behavior, so its direct relationship to foreign language learning contexts should be interpreted with caution. Future research could examine classroom inhibition more directly.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may not fully reflect actual communicative behavior. Observational or mixed-method approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Third, differences in academic backgrounds across the three countries' samples may have influenced communication patterns and classroom expectations.

Finally, the findings are limited to Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia and cannot be generalized to all cultural contexts.

Despite these limitations, this study provides an initial step toward understanding communicative inhibition as a culturally embedded phenomenon and highlights the importance of considering sociocultural factors in interpreting classroom silence.

Conclusion

This study examined communicative inhibition across Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia and found that student silence reflects culturally shaped communication patterns rather than solely foreign language anxiety. Japanese students emphasize interpersonal harmony, Malaysian students navigate multicultural sensitivity, and Indonesian students balance relational awareness with caution toward authority. These findings highlight the importance of interpreting classroom silence within its sociocultural context. Understanding communicative inhibition can help educators foster more inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors used AI-assisted tools solely for language editing and formatting. All research content, analysis, and conclusions are the original work of the authors.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Items From the Inhibition Survey Questionnaire (Wyatt et al., 1996)

The questionnaire used in this study consists of 33 items designed to measure reasons why individuals may refrain from expressing sincere opinions in social contexts. Participants rated each item on a **10-point Likert scale** ranging from **1 (strongly disagree)** to **10 (strongly agree)**.

Item	Statement
Q1	Saying what is on your mind may harm or damage other people.
Q2	Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for.
Q3	You want to be polite.
Q4	You like for everything to go smoothly.
Q5	You could be sued.
Q6	Your language could be offensive to other people.
Q7	People may misunderstand what you mean.
Q8	Someone might take what you say the wrong way.
Q9	Others may think you are rude.
Q10	People may become upset with you.
Q11	You may create tension in the conversation.
Q12	People may become angry with you.
Q13	You may damage relationships with others.
Q14	Others may disagree strongly with you.
Q15	Someone might challenge your opinion.
Q16	People may criticize you.
Q17	People may think you do not know what you are talking about.
Q18	People you admire and respect may not approve of you.
Q19	You may appear disrespectful.
Q20	People may judge you negatively.

Item	Statement
Q21	You may be arrested for your opinions.
Q22	Authorities may take action against you.
Q23	Police or government authorities may monitor your conversation.
Q24	Someone may report what you said.
Q25	Your words may be used against you.
Q26	You may face institutional consequences.
Q27	People you want to be like may reject you.
Q28	You may be excluded from a group.
Q29	Others may punish you socially.
Q30	You may lose opportunities because of what you say.
Q31	You may regret what you say later.
Q32	Someone might misinterpret your intention.
Q33	Expressing your opinion may create conflict.

Appendix B

Pairwise Country Comparisons of Mean Inhibition Scores (Anova Results)

Detailed statistical results for the 31 item-level analyses of variance (ANOVAs) conducted in this study are provided in this appendix. These analyses examined cross-cultural differences in communicative inhibition for each questionnaire item across the three national samples.

The Benjamini–Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) correction was applied to control for multiple comparisons. After correction, 21 items showed statistically significant differences among the three countries, while 10 did not.

ANOVA	Averages			Ind <-> Jap			Mal <-> Jap			Mal <-> Ind			Question				
	Qn	Jap	Ind	Mal	Ind <-> Jap	diff	p-val	Sig.	Mal <-> Jap	diff	p-val	Sig.		Mal <-> Ind	diff	p-val	Sig.
1	Q01	8.02	6.19	5.19	Ind < Jap	-1.83	0.0000	***	Mal < Jap	-2.83	0.0000	***	Mal < Ind	-1.00	0.0108	*	Saying what's on your mind may harm or damage other people
2	Q02	8.11	6.15	5.59	Ind < Jap	-1.96	0.0000	***	Mal < Jap	-2.52	0.0000	***	Mal < Ind	-0.56	0.2584		Speaking your mind may hurt the feelings of those you care for
3	Q03	8.08	8.10	8.15	Ind < Jap	-0.16	0.8396		Mal < Jap	-0.50	0.1276		Mal < Ind	-0.34	0.5222		You want to be polite.
4	Q04	6.79	5.25	3.89	Ind > Jap	1.32	0.0001	***	Mal > Jap	1.37	0.0000	***	Mal > Ind	0.05	0.9876		You like for everything to go smoothly.
5	Q05	3.26	6.06	4.38	Ind > Jap	1.99	0.0000	***	Mal > Jap	0.63	0.1153		Mal < Ind	-1.36	0.0013	**	You could be sued.
6	Q06	7.38	6.74	5.56	Ind < Jap	-1.32	0.0003	***	Mal < Jap	-3.00	0.0000	***	Mal < Ind	-1.68	0.0000	***	Your language could be offensive to other people.
7	Q07	3.80	6.06	5.24	Ind > Jap	0.55	0.2904		Mal < Jap	-0.24	0.7459		Mal < Ind	-0.79	0.1126		You may be hit or physically harmed.
8	Q08	7.02	4.79	5.65	Ind > Jap	0.71	0.1248		Mal > Jap	0.17	0.8550		Mal < Ind	-0.54	0.3519		You like to avoid arguments.
9	Q09	5.63	7.28	4.51	Ind > Jap	1.10	0.0065	**	Mal < Jap	-0.07	0.9713		Mal < Ind	-1.17	0.0069	**	What you say may be taken out of context or misquoted.
10	Q10	4.01	5.29	5.64	Ind > Jap	0.86	0.0404	*	Mal > Jap	0.74	0.0506		Mal < Ind	-0.12	0.9438		Your teacher may make things difficult for you.
11	Q11	5.83	6.25	5.19	Ind > Jap	0.03	0.9976		Mal < Jap	-0.46	0.3702		Mal < Ind	-0.49	0.4674		What you say may come back to haunt you.
12	Q12	6.61	5.74	4.95	Ind < Jap	-0.55	0.2209		Mal < Jap	-1.37	0.0000	***	Mal < Ind	-0.81	0.0612		Your opinions could be offensive to other people.
13	Q13	6.54	6.00	4.85	Ind < Jap	-1.74	0.0000	***	Mal < Jap	-0.88	0.0163	*	Mal > Ind	0.86	0.0681		You may be misunderstood.
14	Q14	4.01	5.75	3.48	Ind > Jap	3.27	0.0000	***	Mal > Jap	0.50	0.2365		Mal < Ind	-2.77	0.0000	***	You may not get ahead in the school work.
15	Q15	7.53	5.19	4.87	Ind < Jap	-2.24	0.0000	***	Mal < Jap	-1.89	0.0000	***	Mal > Ind	0.35	0.6180		You don't want to get involved.
17	Q17	5.07	6.15	3.53	Ind > Jap	1.18	0.0038	**	Mal > Jap	0.12	0.9215		Mal < Ind	-1.06	0.0200	*	People may think you don't know what you're talking about.
18	Q18	4.35	5.46	4.90	Ind > Jap	1.38	0.0003	***	Mal > Jap	0.60	0.1406		Mal < Ind	-0.79	0.0974		People you admire and respect may not approve of you.
19	Q19	4.54	5.43	4.09	Ind > Jap	1.46	0.0004	***	Mal > Jap	0.30	0.6355		Mal < Ind	-1.15	0.0121	*	A spouse, relative or close friend is listening and would not approve of what you say.
20	Q20	5.42	5.69	5.05	Ind < Jap	-0.58	0.2775		Mal < Jap	-0.04	0.9911		Mal > Ind	0.54	0.3847		You are uncomfortable expressing an unpopular viewpoint.
21	Q21	2.03	6.19	5.19	Ind > Jap	3.72	0.0000	***	Mal > Jap	1.45	0.0000	***	Mal < Ind	-2.27	0.0000	***	You may be arrested for your opinions.
22	Q22	3.74	6.15	5.59	Ind > Jap	1.45	0.0006	***	Mal > Jap	1.13	0.0032	**	Mal < Ind	-0.32	0.7141		It's not worth the effort.
23	Q23	1.48	8.10	8.15	Ind > Jap	4.67	0.0000	***	Mal > Jap	2.05	0.0000	***	Mal < Ind	-2.62	0.0000	***	Police or government authorities may monitor your conversation.
24	Q24	5.13	5.25	3.89	Ind < Jap	-0.28	0.7687		Mal < Jap	-0.07	0.9792		Mal > Ind	0.21	0.8798		You want everybody to like you.
25	Q25	4.97	6.06	4.38	Ind > Jap	0.73	0.1511		Mal < Jap	-0.12	0.9375		Mal < Ind	-0.84	0.1094		You may make a fool out of your-self.
26	Q26	6.09	6.74	5.56	Ind < Jap	-0.27	0.7623		Mal < Jap	-0.37	0.5253		Mal < Ind	-0.10	0.9679		You are shy.
27	Q27	4.02	6.06	5.24	Ind > Jap	1.44	0.0003	***	Mal > Jap	0.88	0.0212	*	Mal < Ind	-0.56	0.3364		People you want to be like may reject you.
28	Q28	4.84	4.79	5.65	Ind > Jap	0.81	0.0804		Mal > Jap	0.02	0.9988		Mal < Ind	-0.79	0.1215		Your opinions aren't really important.
29	Q29	4.06	7.28	4.51	Ind > Jap	1.37	0.0010	***	Mal > Jap	0.04	0.9935		Mal < Ind	-1.33	0.0032	**	God may punish you for what you say.
30	Q30	5.00	5.29	5.64	Ind > Jap	0.66	0.1748		Mal < Jap	-0.12	0.9265		Mal < Ind	-0.78	0.1202		You are reluctant to express a minority viewpoint.
32	Q32	4.61	6.25	5.19	Ind > Jap	1.64	0.0001	***	Mal > Jap	0.85	0.0410	*	Mal < Ind	-0.79	0.1444		You don't want people to think you are 'odd' or 'different.'
33	Q33	4.28	5.74	4.95	Ind > Jap	1.42	0.0007	***	Mal > Jap	0.78	0.0602		Mal < Ind	-0.64	0.2647		People may think you are not 'cool' (or not 'with it').

Appendix C

Factor Diagrams for Exploratory Factor Analysis

Appendix C presents factor diagrams from the exploratory factor analyses conducted for Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The diagrams show loadings greater than .30 and illustrate the relationships between questionnaire items and latent factors across countries.

Japan (4 factors, cut=0.3)

