

Exploration of Anime “A Silent Voice” as a Media for Mental Health Education: Thematic Analysis of Audience Reactions on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

Background: *A Silent Voice* tells the story of Shoya Ishida, a teenager involved in bullying Shoko Nishimiya, a hearing-impaired girl. The anime touches on deep themes such as bullying, guilt, self-acceptance, and healing, making it a valuable medium for mental health discussion and education. **Objectives:** To explore the anime *A Silent Voice* as a medium for mental health education. **Methods:** This study used social media reactions with a thematic analysis approach. The research began with a YouTube search for videos discussing the anime, resulting in four videos with the highest views and comments. Audience comments from June to August 2024 were extracted and selected, then analyzed to identify common themes related to anime and mental health. **Results:** Discussion comments related to the anime *A Silent Voice* had 237 identified conversations discussing anime and mental health. The major topics discussed in the discussion are bullying; self-acceptance; suicide; the impact of watching anime; opinions and lessons learned from anime; and opinions on characters in anime. The conversations highlighted the profound impact on viewers, especially those who have experienced depression, bullying, or isolation. **Conclusions:** The anime *A Silent Voice* is seen as a highly impactful and emotionally resonant movie that addresses themes of self-acceptance, empathy, and personal growth, which leaves a deep impression on its audience. This research is limited to discussions on YouTube comments. Further research must be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the anime *A Silent Voice* on viewer's mental health.

Keywords: Anime, Education, Mental Health, SDGs, Quality Education

INTRODUCTION

Anime has become one of the most globally influential forms of entertainment, capable of telling complex and profound stories that address social and mental health issues (Iwasaki, 2021; Yusof et al., 2021). One work that stands out in this context is *A Silent Voice* (Koe no Katachi), an anime that addresses school bullying while promoting sign language (Kaminishi, 2023). The anime follows the emotional journey of Shoya Ishida, a teenager who faces the repercussions of his bullying behavior toward Shoko Nishimiya, a hearing-impaired girl (Budiman et al., 2023; Koe No Katachi Fandom, 2020b). Over time, Shoya must confront the consequences of

his actions and endeavor to make amends (Koe No Katachi Fandom, 2020b). Meanwhile, Shoko grapples with the trauma and social challenges brought about by the bullying (Koe No Katachi Fandom, 2020a). The anime delves into various profound themes such as bullying, guilt, self-acceptance, and the healing process. Viewers are invited to understand the complex emotional dynamics and the importance of social support in trauma recovery.

Previous research has shown that popular media, including dramas, films, and anime, can effectively raise public awareness about mental health issues (Boydell & Croguennec, 2022; Ghazali et al., 2021; Ito-Jaeger et al., 2022). ‘*A Silent Voice*’ not only serves as

entertainment but also has the potential to function as an educational medium, promoting a better understanding of mental health issues, such as the impacts of trauma and isolation, as well as the importance of empathy and self-acceptance (Budiman et al., 2023; Kaminishi, 2023).

YouTube is one platform where anime audiences share their reactions and discussions on the themes presented in various works (Pelttari, 2023; Talukder, 2023). YouTube was chosen because of its unique advantages over other platforms in fostering thoughtful and professional discussions. YouTube creators often approach content with a degree of professionalism that sets their analyses apart, particularly in the anime and film review genres. Additionally, YouTube's format allows for longer video uploads, enabling creators to engage in detailed analysis and discussion that wouldn't be feasible on shorter-form video platforms. Audience comments and reactions on YouTube can provide insight into how anime, such as *A Silent Voice*, influences perceptions of mental health and how the medium facilitates discussions on mental health topics (Lee et al., 2021; Pelttari, 2023).

This anime stands out among other anime for its deeply nuanced portrayal of bullying, guilt, and redemption, offering a unique exploration of complex emotional and psychological themes. This anime addresses teenage bullying from a very touching point of view, which is not common in the animated medium.

Anime *A Silent Voice* also stands out for its respectful and sensitive portrayal of characters, particularly in terms of how it avoids exploiting or overly sexualizing female characters. Unlike some other anime that may use fan service or overly sexualized imagery, *A Silent Voice* maintains a grounded and modest representation of its characters. This approach aligns well with Indonesian cultural values, making it a comfortable choice for viewers looking for impactful storytelling without inappropriate or sensationalized depictions.

This study aims to explore the role of *A Silent Voice* as a medium for mental health education based on a thematic analysis of audience reactions on YouTube. It is expected that this study will contribute to the understanding of

how anime can serve as an effective tool to promote mental health awareness among its audience.

METHODS

This research used social media reaction research with thematic analysis approach to explore the anime *A Silent Voice* as a medium for mental health education. The research process began with an electronic search on the YouTube platform to identify videos discussing or reviewing *A Silent Voice*. From this search, four videos from four different content creators with the highest number of views and comments were selected. The selected creators also bring specific expertise and persona that contribute to a broader understanding of mental health themes in *A Silent Voice*. For instance, Studio G*** critiques film and TV with a thoughtful approach, K*** K** offers introspective analyses with a personal impact focus, and Ya**** provides authentic, blind reactions to anime. Kam**** adopts an "edutainment" style, while Cinema Th*** includes insights from a licensed therapist, examining complex psychological themes such as depression, social connection, and forgiveness. This range of perspectives makes YouTube an ideal choice for capturing diverse, meaningful reactions that enrich the study of mental health representation in anime.

Audience comments from June to August 2024 were extracted using <https://exportcomments.com/>. The results of the comment extraction were combined, and comments that were not relevant to the discussion of anime *A Silent Voice* and mental health were eliminated. The remaining textual material was then reviewed and thematically analyzed to identify common discussion themes regarding this anime and mental health.

The analyses were done manually through six steps qualitative data analyses following Creswell (2009). First is organizing and preparing data for analysis. Then reading through the data to get an overview, and reflecting on the overall meaning. Third, detailed analysis begins through coding, organizing the material into segments according to categories followed by using the coding process to generate descriptions of

settings or people, categories or themes to analyse. The descriptions and themes are then developed into a research draft. And finally, is interpreting the meaning of the analyzed data to answer the research questions or raise new questions. The details of the method are shown in Figure 1.

YouTube is a social media platform that can be freely accessed by its users.

Additionally, YouTube users have agreed to terms and conditions that include explanations regarding usage guidelines, including the fact that YouTube comments are public. This study utilized audience comments from four reaction videos of *A Silent Voice*, which users agreed were public; therefore, this study did not require ethical approval

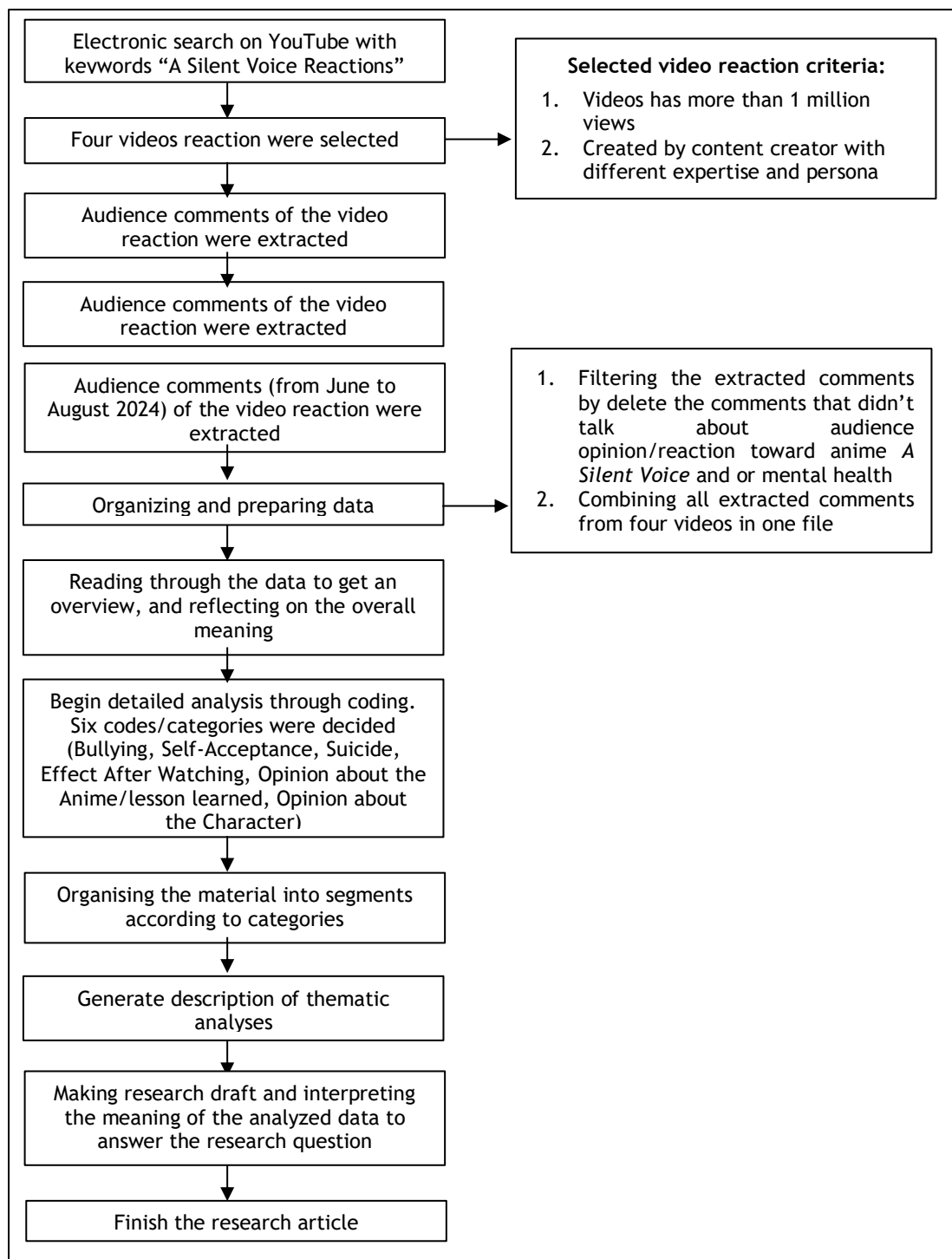


Figure 1.Details of the Method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussion comments related to the anime *A Silent Voice* revealed 237 conversations addressing anime and mental health. The major topics identified in these discussions include bullying, self-acceptance, suicide, the impact of watching anime, opinions and lessons learned from the anime, and perspectives on the characters within it.

Bullying

Conversations about bullying revealed the audience's personal experiences and reflections. Many viewers felt a strong connection to the characters and the bullying situations depicted, often drawing parallels to their own lives. The anime was praised for effectively portraying the emotional and psychological impact of bullying; however, some viewers expressed dissatisfaction with the story's resolution, feeling it was unjust towards the victim, Shoko Nishimiya. While the realistic depiction of bullying was appreciated, it was also noted that, for some, it was challenging to watch.

"I was with the ending because I felt like she didn't get enough justice that she deserved" - F, joined YouTube since 2021

"This movie is picturing it really well that's why not many people would like this movie because it doesn't have ending the way we would all have hoped." - F, joined YouTube since 2021

Many comments highlighted the duality between victims and bullies, with viewers reflecting on their experiences as both. The theme of difficulty in forgiving bullies also emerged, revealing deep emotional scars. These comments demonstrated the long-term impact of bullying on self-esteem, social anxiety, and the challenges of moving on after a traumatic experience. Some commenters expressed support for fellow viewers who had experienced bullying, showcasing a community of sharing and encouragement (Sekar & Fauzia, 2023).

"I really relate to this, because

when I was younger (kindergarten level), I was a bully. The kid I was bullying was so nice, and I was bullying him for no reason. I wish that boy everything in the world, because he deserves it. Nobody should ever be bullied. I was also bullied a ton as a kid, later than kindergarten. I can relate to both main characters in this story, making me want to watch this movie even more." - S, joined YouTube since 2019

"I didn't like this film a bit... because as a kid who was bullied... who is still not able to recover... I am not forgiving as Nishimiya... so it bothered me that we have to forgive Ishida because in real life bullies remains bullies or that's what i think so... i have not lived enough to see them change... I don't know what to feel about this movie?" - S, joined YouTube since 2021

"This movie is picturing it really well that's why not many people would like this movie because it doesn't have ending the way we would all have hoped. If she's YOU and you happen to read my comment, you deserve a place where you're appreciated, loved and wanted. Save your energy to find that place instead of using it for people that just couldn't bring themselves to like you." - F, joined YouTube since 2021

*"It saved me to I've stopped being mean like a lot I've stopped casue I've always bullied somebody named N**** sometimes he was my friend from years ago but he told me he was BI but I stopped talking to him but I sometimes talk to him but 99% we stopped talking"* - H, joined YouTube since 2020

Self-Acceptance

Many comments highlighted the strong emotional impact of the anime *A Silent Voice*, with numerous viewers admitting to shedding tears while watching it. The film provides a cathartic experience, helping viewers confront personal struggles and offering a sense of relief and understanding. Some viewers expressed difficulty with self-acceptance,

noting that the anime resonates with those grappling with past mistakes or traumas.

"I spent a lot of time crying with this movie. Self-acceptance can sometimes be terrible or even unattainable for many." - G, joined YouTube since 2008

"This was a very dramatic anime. I absolutely loved it. Great message and carefully written to not give the young people a wrong message. It's about loving yourself and forgiving your self but also how to love friends. The illustration and scrips is top tier. ❤️😊" - J, joined YouTube since 2022

The depiction of the characters' struggles offers a reflection for the audience, transforming this anime into a tool for introspection. The theme of forgiveness is also emphasized, encompassing both self-forgiveness and the forgiveness of others. Some viewers believe the anime conveys the importance of forgiveness as a crucial aspect of self-acceptance. It provides a new perspective on life and relationships, inspiring them to become a positive force for others as a means of atoning for their feelings of guilt. Many audience members felt that the anime helped them realize the significance of self-acceptance and that they deserve happiness.

"Watching in 2024 and no matter what reaction I watch on this movie, it still is extremely impactful to everyone. As someone who has dealt with ideas and feelings of self deletion based on passed actions and mistakes I couldn't get past, I realized the greatest remedy in life for that is to focus fully on being a positive force for others. You don't have to save the world, you just need to take the focus off of yourself and do what you can to love and help someone else. I believe fully God put us on this planet with a purpose and my faith in Jesus has led me to try my hardest to love others out of the same places I was in in my life. We love cause we were first loved, that's the best advice I could ever give anyone." - A, joined YouTube since 2018

"I will never forget how at my lowest this movie gave me hope and the ability to understand myself and others. i am doing much better now, and although i am still learning how to love myself and others properly, this movie, and specifically Shoukos breakdown with Shoya after he woke up in the hospital, has reminded me constantly that it is possible. For that I am eternally grateful." - K, joined YouTube since 2018

Not all viewers were satisfied with the portrayal of this theme, particularly regarding the forgiveness of bullies. This diversity of reactions underscores the subjective nature of media consumption, as the same anime can elicit different emotional responses based on the audience's personal experiences (Negrão et al., 2022).

"This film perfectly captures the feeling of not being able to forgive yourself. For me, I had always had the idea 'Forgiving myself feels like condoning what I did so I would rather mentally torture myself and live a sad life as penance rather than acknowledge I've grown and moved on from who I was back then'. The toll that guilt and shame takes is so real and this movie represents that so purely that I couldn't help but cry when I first saw it. It's something me and probably a lot of people still struggle with but having this film out there really helps to shed light on it" - K, joined YouTube since 2012

Suicide

Many audience members revealed that the anime *A Silent Voice* had a profound impact on their lives, helping them navigate difficult times, including suicidal thoughts. Some expressed that the film "saved" them, suggesting that it provided hope, understanding, or a new perspective on life. The anime inspires viewers to reflect on their own experiences, especially for those who have faced significant challenges such as suicidal thoughts or attempts. For this audience, the themes explored in the film are particularly relevant and evocative, resonating with their personal struggles and fostering a sense of connectedness or understanding that may be hard to find

elsewhere.

"I was truly thinking about killing myself, this movie was recommended to me by a friend, this movie fixed me, he saved me without even knowing." - N, joined YouTube since 2023

"Honestly I didn't really know how to write what I feel but now I can say that this movie really helped and helps me to stay alive." - I, joined YouTube since 2022

"As someone who has struggled with suicidal thoughts and anxiety, this movie means so much to me. It's been a comfort film ever since its first viewing. I watched it when I was super suicidal and it really changed something inside of me. I didn't really know a film could make such a difference in my life, but it really did. Thank you for looking at this. It's one of my favorites." - G, joined YouTube since 2023

Impact After Watching The Anime

Many audience members described watching *A Silent Voice* as a powerful emotional release, with many finding themselves in tears afterward. The film successfully evokes deep emotions by addressing both personal and universal themes such as social anxiety, self-acceptance, and social challenges. Viewers praised the film for raising awareness about the treatment of individuals with disabilities, fostering empathy and prompting social criticism. Some viewers reported feeling moved even after watching the film multiple times, highlighting its lasting impact.

"i just watched the movie i cried after a long time for a movie 🥹🥹" - G, joined YouTube since 2017

"I've seen this movie three times, and I've cried each time. I have attempted suicide three times and after that experience, this movie hits so much harder" - T, joined YouTube since 2019

The film was also praised for its artistic elements, including its music and animation. The incorporation of real-life

locations adds an extra layer of connection with the audience, making the narrative feel more authentic. Overall, the film effectively presents the harsh realities faced by those who are different or vulnerable, encouraging viewers to reflect on significant social issues with profound emotions and a deep sense of empathy.

"This movie is not a movie. It's a masterpiece. The music, the animation, the camerawork. Everything. I love this with all of my being because it's something that really makes you feel physically and mentally. By the way, this is actually based in a real place. That bridge exists in real life!" - C, joined YouTube since 2024

"A silent voice is truly one the best pieces of media to exist it was so emotional and beautiful 🥹🥹❤️" - Y, joined YouTube since 2021

Opinion and Lesson Learned

The anime emphasizes the importance of friendships that endure adversity, prompting some viewers to reflect on their personal relationships. The realism of the characters and their struggles—such as social anxiety, depression, and the effects of bullying—are perceived as very authentic, helping viewers feel understood and less isolated.

"Never thought a movie would impact me so much until I watched A Silent Voice. It's definitely taught me that the glue in friendships isn't what you do together or how well you click -- it's how you solve conflicts together. Whether it be between each other, or outside of the friendship, if you know the friendship is worth it, you push through and you work things out." - K, joined YouTube since 2012

For some viewers, the film was more than just a spectacle; it was a life-changing experience that inspired them to reconsider their actions and attitudes. Lines like "I want you to help me live" resonated deeply with audiences, conveying a powerful message about the importance of support and the courage to ask for help.

"It really helped me change my perspective on having the will to start trying to overcome my depression. It's like the story was trying to tell me 'Hey. There's a whole world out there.'" - F, joined YouTube since 2011

"He said, not 'I want to help you live.' but 'I want you to help me live.' This is the most important and beautiful message in this movie." - N, joined YouTube since 2012

Opinion about the Characters

The characters in the anime that captured the audience's attention include Shoya Ishida, Shoko Nishimiya, Naoka Ueno, Miki Kawai, Tomohiro Nagatsuka, the Homeroom Teacher, and Kazuki Shimada. Central to the story is Shoya's transformation from a bully to someone seeking redemption. Viewers appreciated the realistic portrayal of Shoya's social anxiety and inner conflict, recognizing his emotional journey as one of the best examples of character development. His difficulty in connecting with others, symbolized by the letter "X" on their faces, resonated deeply with viewers who shared similar feelings of guilt and isolation.

"This movie absolutely broke me when I first watched it, the scene of the X's falling off everyones face and him finally seeing the world for what it is, is what just shattered me" - A, joined YouTube since 2015

"One thing i don't think people noticed was Ishida always thought people were constantly talking about him negatively, everyone except the people whose X's fell off because he interacts with them and actually listens to them. and until he went to school with his face down with Nishimiya's guidance he still heard people talking about him negatively. until the school festival where he finally released his hands from his ears and heard people properly he realized everyone was living their own lives and no one mentioned his name a single time. this whole time he turned his life into a mental prison by his own hands. and in the end by sticking to his word and listening to people. he

finally free'd himself from the prison he's held himself in for all these years." - K, joined YouTube since 2018

Shoko, a deaf girl and the victim of bullying, embodies both vulnerability and strength. Her kindness and willingness to forgive evoke sympathy from the audience, although some viewers express frustration over her tendency to over-apologize, wishing she could be more assertive in defending herself.

"I don't understand this movie man people praise it but i feel like its not that good like ueno kept getting away with being a shitty person and she keeps bullying shoko, and all shoko does is apologise??? And how does she forgive shoya so easily i feel like this is so all over the place what happened to shoko saying i love you to him? Why does she not say it again? I dont understand this movie at all and maybe that's just my problem" - M, joined YouTube since 2021

"Sure, girl with dark hair is not a good person but the innocent girl with pink hair is always busy trying to fix something she didn't break. It's so tiring to see the pink hair girl is still being all nice yet always get treated so bad. Unfortunately, that happens in real world, so many people have ended their lives because of this matter" - A, joined YouTube since 2012

Ueno, a highly divisive character, elicited mixed reactions from viewers. Some found her unforgivable, while others appreciated the complexity of her character. However, her inability to change, unlike the other characters, frustrated many viewers.

"... also, screw Ueno. She's a trash human. But, at least she learned enough sign language to tell Yishimiya that she thinks she's stupid and that gives me hope that Ueno can also redeem herself" - T, joined YouTube since 2022

"A lot of people hate on the character Ueno. But she's the only one that never lied to herself or others. she kept kept it real the enire time

and didnt pretended to be someone else.” - C, joined YouTube since 2009

“I’ve watched the movie countless times and I still cannot find myself to accept Ueno’s never changing feelings towards Nishimiya.” - J, joined YouTube since 2018

Kawai was perceived as cunning, presenting an innocent facade that belied her involvement in the bullying. She faced criticism for avoiding responsibility, maintaining a guise of innocence while still contributing to a harmful situation.

“...If you see the first part, you can see Kawai opening her mouth and Shoko thought the singing started. So Kawai is as evil as Ueno” - I, joined YouTube since 2021

“I think yall missed it. Cause Kawai was part of the bullying... She stood idly by and was a follower of Ueno. She snickered at jokes, and used an innocent girl facade. She’s sensitive when it comes to her character, and wants to avoid conflict with herself, but she instigates by gossiping. Perfect representation of that kind of personality archetype.” - R, joined YouTube since 2014

The homeroom teacher was also criticized for inadequately addressing the bullying, even exacerbating the situation by scapegoating Shoya. Her hands-off attitude reflected a broader issue regarding authorities' handling of bullying.

“... teacher is the villain. He didn't try to accommodate his teaching for Nishimiya and was frowning in frustration during mandatory sign language segment, he knew children are bullying Nishimiya but he didn't do anything about it until he was forced by principal... and then he scapegoats Ishida and turn him in to the target of bullying stunting his growth and making Nishimiya blame herself for Ishida's bullying.” - A, joined YouTube since 2013

Kazuki, portrayed as cruel and unrepentant, continued her bullying behavior without remorse, rendering her unforgivable in the eyes of many viewers.

Her lack of empathy and ongoing hostility toward Shoya made her one of the most disliked characters, epitomizing someone who fails to change despite facing consequences.

“...the white haired bastard that bullied Ishida. That mofo regrets NOTHING! He thinks he did nothing wrong. Not enough attention was put on that guy, I don't think he was at the bridge either. He was cruel and he liked it. Ishida had ptsd from him. I think Ishida met him again at the amusement park. That guy has no empathy, probably why his eyes are so lifeless” - A, joined YouTube since 2005

The characters in “A Silent Voice” are intricately crafted, each contributing to the film's exploration of themes such as bullying, redemption, and the complexities of human relationships. While some characters inspire admiration and empathy, others provoke frustration and anger, reflecting a nuanced and realistic depiction of individual journeys. It is this complexity that makes the film so impactful and resonant with its audience (Loriguillo-López et al., 2020; Wang, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The anime *A Silent Voice* is regarded as a profoundly impactful and emotionally resonant film that explores themes of self-acceptance, empathy, and personal growth, leaving a lasting impression on its viewers. It serves as a powerful tool to facilitate conversations about mental health, promote empathy, and encourage self-reflection. The film addresses the emotional toll of bullying, the experience of isolation and social anxiety, and the importance of social support, fostering a deeper understanding of the mental struggles that many individuals face. However, this study was limited to discussions found in YouTube comments. Further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of *A Silent Voice* on viewers' mental health.

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