

## Students' silence in the EFL speaking classroom

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### Abstract

Silence became fundamental part to be investigated especially in the university level in which it frequently transpire among EFL students. The objective of this study is to identify students silence in the EFL speaking classroom in which it has three research question and they were (1) What are the reasons of the students to keep silent in the EFL speaking class, (2) How does lecturer overcome students' silence in the EFL class, (3) How does lecturer inspire the students to not keeping silent in the EFL class. The subject of the study were students of the second semester and lecturer at the Islamic State University in which they were chosen purposively. The data were collected through several instruments; observation field-notes and semi-structured interview. In depth, observation field-notes was used to get students who became silent in a class. Moreover, semi-structure interview was given in order to get the result of three research questions that have been formulated. The study revealed that thirteen students kept silent during the process of learning where their major reasons were different among students. Furthermore, it was also found that a lecturer have several strategies in overcoming and inspiring students to not keep silent in which involve of provided students opportunity to speak, guided students to speak, and asked them to firstly wrote down their opinion before presenting it.

Keywords: *Silence, EFL classroom, speaking class, classroom interaction*

### INTRODUCTION

Silence is known as a situation which students does not talk about or answer question from teacher. In addition, Leander and Kevin (2002) reveals that silencing as the processes- means by which an individual or group's participation is diminished or closed out of an interaction altogether. It can be stated that silence as a part of interaction in the classroom that make students become quiet in a certain condition. It is because the condition of students silence becomes a crucial issue that can influence their language academic ability. Harumi (2011) asserts that the existence of silence in second language learning context can be a source of conflict between students and teacher or even among students themselves. It can also be an obstacle to acquiring the target language. However, their silence cannot be categorized as a negative behavior. Because, sometimes few students who have been understood the material did not

want to show their ability to speak in front of others.

Choi (2015) asserts that silence is a lack of communication contact with others. In that case, students might not able to say something especially about certain topic in the classroom. In a journal entitled "Classroom silence: voices from Japanese EFL learners" Harumi (2011) explores about Japanese EFL learners' classroom silence in a Japanese EFL context. The result of the study revealed that a number of interrelated factors explain learner silence; the roots lie in linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors, including communicative style. Concerning on the issue above, it should be stressed that students silence becomes essential to be observed in order to assist teacher to be able to use certain strategy in creating active classroom.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Silence is a phenomenon that always exists in the classroom interaction especially

in the EFL class. It is because most students still have difficulties in expressing their ideas using English as a foreign language. The students who remain silent still appear in the class, even though the classroom participation takes charge of grading the students. Sometimes, students are not keeping their eye contact to the teacher's explanation. However, their silence cannot be categorized as passive behavior or does not necessarily mean not participating during the learning process.

There is also the temporary silence of a whole participating group or certain individuals during a certain speech event. In ordinary conversation, some participants remain silent for a certain period of time while others engaged in conversation (Nakane, 2007). Silence in general term, is usually perceived to be the absence of sound. In communicative context, silence is usually considered to be the absence of or the opposite to speech. Tannen and Saville-Troike (1985) in their book revealed that "Silence" is different from "quiet" when it is taken for the purpose of classroom scenarios. "Quiet" refers to an objective state possessing no or slight sound or motion. Both terms can be used interchangeably in the educational setting.

Morehead (2001) asserted that silence is the absence of sound. Ping (2010) stated that the word "silent" is not merely defined as an individual decision not to speak. Regarding with the those statements above, it is indicated that silence as a means of the inability of students to talk or express their thoughts and ideas in front of teacher and other students. Baurain (2011) revealed that silence is absence, withdrawing, or withholding, perhaps as a result of disinterest, boredom, frustration, or force.

Silence functions as an important part of non-verbal communication and it is translated as a time to think and respect one's counterpart in Asia, it is often interpreted as somewhat negative, regardless of its cause, in North America. Thus, the silence of Asian students in U. S. classroom is often misunderstood and viewed as a lack of oral participation by U. S. classmates and instructors (Nakane, 2007).

In EFL class, silence is a necessity. For example, when the teacher raises a question or assigns some tasks for group work, students need time to think and prepare for that. In early study, Rowe (1974) in Jaworski and

Sachdev (1998) examined how increase in 'wait-times' affected performances of students, finding that increased 'wait-time' enhanced quality of instruction in the classroom. If the standard 'wait-time' of teachers after questioning was increased from around 1.0 second to around 3.0 seconds, the length of response increased, frequency of failure to respond decreased and quality of responses as well as initiation by students increased. Moreover, confidence reflected in student responses increased, and students who were regarded as slow and poor performers contributed more and gave better performances.

### **Silence in the Classroom Interaction**

The presence of interaction between teacher and students or student and student become the integral part in creating positive classroom environment. Dealing with the meaning of classroom silence Schultz's cited in Baurain (2011) state that silence is a multifaceted, often purposeful border between thoughts and speech or between thoughts and words. Silence might indicate thoughts that cannot be spoken, truths or realities that are or seem to be inexpressible. Students thought what they want to speak but does not know how to speak it or not ready to speak whatever the reason. Reda (2012) acknowledges that those students not being able to speak in the class are highly affected by particular contexts of class, race, and culture. She believes that anxiety about student silence in any professional situation is also controlled by "difficult classroom situations and the unjust power relations between teachers and students.

Silence in a classroom can signalize resistance, boredom, respect, discouragement, disinterest, thoughtfulness, or such interactional strategies as denial, agreement, request, warning, command, threat, confirmation (Silva, 2016). The focus of research on silence in the classroom has mostly been on the negative aspects of silence. Silence which appears in the classroom mostly created a negative perception and interpretation from the teacher. It has been known that most studies on silence in the classroom focus on teacher-students interaction.

## METHOD

This research applied a qualitative research. It is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The qualitative research approach applied here is grounded theory in which the researcher focuses on how an individually derived theory about a phenomenon is grounded in the data in a particular setting (Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006, p. 598)).

To investigate the students' silence in the classroom, the subject of this research were both students of second semester and English lecturer at that university. It is used purposive sampling in which the researcher has own criteria to determine the subject. Based on the preliminary research, the research chose the subjects because they can representative of population and will be good key informants who contributed to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon.

There were two instruments applied in this research in order to obtain the data and they were field notes and semi-structure interview. Field notes was used as an assistance to observe the learning and teaching process in the EFL classroom and semi-structure interview was asked to the students who did not participate actively in the class that consist of thirteen students and the lecturer who taught in this speaking class.

There are three stages of data analysis in this technique, they are called open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998).

### 1. Open coding

Open coding is the first stage in grounded theory data analysis. It begins after some initial data have been collected, and it involves examining the data (usually reading transcript line by line) and naming and categorizing discrete elements in the data. In other words, it involves labeling important words and phrase in the transcribed data.

### 2. Axial coding

Axial coding follows open coding. During axial coding, the researcher develops the concepts into categories and organize the categories. The researcher then looks to see what kind of things the participants mentioned many times. The researcher also looks for

possible relationship among the categories in the data. A goal is to show how the phenomenon operates.

### 3. Selective Coding

Selective coding is the stage of data analysis in which the researcher puts the finishing touches on the grounded theory for the current research study. In particular, this is where the grounded theorist looks for the story line of the theory (i.e., the main idea) by reflecting on the data and the results that were produced during open coding and axial coding. The researcher usually need to continue to analyze the data, but with more focus on the central idea of developing theory. Ultimately, it is during selective coding that the researcher writes the story, explaining the grounded theory.

Doing the selective coding, the researcher also triangulated the data from observations and interview to provide a more valid data and result. The aim is not to determine the truth about some social phenomenon, rather the purpose of triangulation is to increase one's understanding of whatever is being investigated.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Reasons of Students' Silence in the EFL Speaking Class

After the researcher found the students who keep silent during the EFL speaking class, the researcher wanted to know further what are actually the students' reasons to keep silent in EFL speaking class. It is believed that the reason could be vary regarding of each students. To collect the data, semi-structured interview is employed in this study by involving thirteen students that always silent during the learning process. The result of interview displayed that most of students keep silent during speaking class because many reasons. There have been thirteen students revealed their reason about their silence in the EFL speaking classroom. After identifying deeply about their arguments which have been coded by the researcher, it was found that some students who kept silent in the class have psychological problem such as lack of confidence, lack of motivation, emotional problem, different personality and lack of understanding. It is in line with Berman (1998) who stated that such silence is "a socially salient response indicating embarrassment,

confusion, annoyance, lack of understanding, or low esteem.” They could not express their ideas orally because of afraid of making mistakes. Then, the influence of their peers also causes them to keep silent. In this case, few students felt shy to their friends because of their speech. Then, they decided to not talk.

#### **Lecturer’s Strategies of Dealing with Students’ Silence**

This part deals with the result of lecturer’s strategy used to overcome students’ silence. Then, semi-structured interview is used to find the answer the result of this study. The main concerned of this section was to describe the lecturer’s strategies to overcome students’ silence in EFL speaking class. After interviewing a lecturer, the researcher found that there were some strategies implemented by a lecturer in overcoming students’ silence. Those strategies can make the lecturer attempted to enhance students’ language ability especially their speaking skill by directly involving them into process of learning especially in the process of discussion. Moreover, a lecturer frequently invited students to ask several questions by directly pointing each of them to talk. Furthermore, the use of two languages is also is expected could enhance students willingness to talk. Then, they would not keep silent anymore during the process of learning. Then, the essential thing was that how lecturer gave a chance to students in order to express their ideas without afraid of making mistake. Li and Jia (2006) suggested that the lecturer can encourage the students to engage more in class oral participation with consider what students like and what they need and prepare the interesting material. In this case, lecturer is expected to create comfortable atmosphere.

#### **Lecturer’s Way to Motivate Students’ to Not Keep Silent**

It is connected with the lecturer’ efforts to motivate the students to not be keep silent. A lecturer who has been interviewed by the researcher also provided comment concerning on her effort in inspiring students to not keep silent.

*[....I think giving inspiration is a must for the lecture, we are the role model for the students. So they should be good sample, so they should ask the students to enlarge their knowledge, to enrich their*

*vocabularies because sometimes students couldn’t speak because there are lack of knowledge and they should increase their confidence to speak, practice and practice because I always say to my students that practice makes perfect, don’t afraid to make mistakes because from the mistakes we can know what should corrected.*

(Interview with the lecturer, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018)

The statement of the lecturer above revealed that every lecturer has responsibility to enhance students’ academic ability and shape their character especially enlarge their knowledge. In addition, a lecturer should help students to increase their self-confidence and set up their positive learning attitudes in speaking class. Swain (1985) cited in (Zacharias, 2014) assert that to make the students speak in the class is the learners are “pushed” to use the target language in productive tasks and the teacher is the one who has the authority to do so. However, every students should also hard work to achieve their goals. In this case, they should have higher motivation in order to increase their self-confidence. She also emphasized that students should frequently practice to speak, learn new vocabulary in order they can become accustomed to speak. Finally, their problem in speaking can be overcome so they may not keep silent in the class.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and discussions in the preceding chapter, the researcher found that the reasons of students’ silence are different among students. In outline, most of students keep silent are due to the lack of confidence, feeling of having low competence, fear of being judge by the others, lack of understanding or unfamiliarity with the topic, lack of vocabularies, lack of motivation in speaking, have different personalities and do not have chance to speak. The reasons of students’ silence that has been mentioned earlier need to be addressed by the lecturer. The lecturer have to be aware about the students’ silence.

The awareness of students’ silence is important for the lecturer because the lecturer

can create good strategy to overcome the students not to keep silent in the speaking class. Some strategies that the lecturer can use like gave an opportunity for the students to think and write down their opinion before they speak. It can help them to know what they will say. The other strategy is asking the students directly to speak or express their opinion about certain topic. The lecturer believes that this strategy can make the students to speak especially for the introvert students. Make a group discussion is one strategy for the lecturer to make the students not keep silent in the speaking class. By group discussion, the students can share their opinion with the other friends. And the last strategy is guided them to speak by using mix languages.

It can help them speak easily because they can combine the language if they do not know the words in the target language. In the other hand, the lecturer have to always give motivation for the students to always practice speaking to increase their speaking skill and always support them. The way that can be done by teacher to motivate students to not keep silent by providing opportunity to express their feelings, thoughts, and ideas. Giving chance to students would directly assist students' psychological problem such as their confidence, shy and anxious. Then, it is believed that lecturer's role become important in the process of learning.

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