

STUDENTS' SILENCE IN DIFFERENT EFL LEARNING PROCESSES AND THE PROLONGED EFFECTS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY STUDY

Nita Listiyaningtyas¹, Akmal²

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

¹ nita2107042010@webmail.uad.ac.id, ² akmal@mpbi.uad.ac.id

Abstract

Students' silence rapidly grows during online learning and continually affects the present learning process. Students showed various reasons for being silent. The study aims to determine students' reasons for being silent in different EFL learning processes; online learning, limited face-to-face learning, and a whole class of face-to-face learning, and its prolonged effect on their learning behavior. The study used qualitative research with an autoethnography method. The study's data was collected through observation, narrative journaling, and a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview was conducted with five sample students from five different classes, chosen purposively based on the researcher's criteria. The finding shows that students are silent in online learning because the English learning process is not fun, they are afraid of making mistakes, and they cannot interact with the teacher and other friends. Students' silence decreases when they have a limited class of face-to-face learning and almost entirely disappears during the whole class of face-to-face learning. However, students' silence continued until the present EFL class, affecting their cognitive and social skills. Teachers need to apply appropriate teaching strategies to break students' silence and improve their participation in the learning process.

Keywords: Face-to-Face Learning; Online Learning; Students' Silence

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, there has been a phenomenon about the rising number of students' silence in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms (Gangavarapu et al., 2022). The assumption that being silent is better than being talkative is still part of Indonesian culture. Talkative students were often considered disrespectful, while quiet students were considered good behavior. Students' silence plays a significant role in language learning (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Some teachers or language educators might see students' silence as a signal of error in the lesson (Zafarina, 2022), while others might see it as an essential function for communication and language acquisition (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Further, Karas & Uchihara (2021) mentioned that silence could be interpreted differently depending on the experiences and background.

However, the assumption about silence is no longer valid regarding the current situation in which foreign culture and technology have come along with our daily lives. In a language classroom, in this case, English, students are expected to speak and be active learners who consistently participate in language learning to increase language acquisition and practice the target language for communication purposes (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). Thus, many experts are promoting the student-centered learning approach to reduce students' silence and improve students' participation in the language learning process. Student-centered learning is a model where students are at the core of the learning process aiming at providing authentic, need-based instructions and cooperative and collaborative learning through an active, democratic, and

child-friendly approach (Singh, 2011). Student-centered activities are beneficial to build students' confidence and giving positive feedback to speak to break the silence during the learning process (Zafarina, 2022). Student-centered learning urges students to get involved in every stage of learning. It allows students to lead the learning activities, be active in the discussion, free to look for other materials from different sources, and state opinions on how the learning process should be conducted. The student-centered approach focuses on what the student is learning, how students are learning, the students' conditions, and how current learning positions the student for future learning (Weimer, 2002).

Concerning the students' silence, not all students can actively participate in student-centered learning, which requires independent skills in many aspects of learning. As Singh (2011) explained, students must change their traditionally passive mindsets towards an active learning orientation to successfully implement student-centered learning. The mindset changes will be beneficial for students in reducing their silence during the language learning process. Nevertheless, it becomes more challenging because some students remain silent. Students' silence in the learning process has different reasons. A group of students might be silent because they choose to do so, other students may not know what to say, and others might be too afraid of making mistakes during language learning. Teachers and language educators should not only pay attention to the students' silence reasons but also investigate the reasons behind it (Zafarina, 2022).

Students' silence has rapidly increased in the past years due to the covid outbreak, which made the learning process conducted online. Students can only meet their friends and teacher in person for a short time. They can only see each other virtually. Students missed getting to know and socializing with their classmates and teachers. Many students are being silenced during online learning. It was awkward talking to their friend on the screen. They did not know what they would say or how to start talking to them. Students also did not know the teachers well, and most feared them. As a result, students tend to stay silent and refrain from showing interaction both with the teachers and their friends. In-class silence mostly happens when the teachers give questions or invite them to the class discussion, but students do not show any responses (Hanh, 2020). Students' silent behaviors generally symbolize their adverse reaction to the teacher and hinder language teaching and learning. Silence can be problematic if it is caused by distraction, loss of interest, limited ability, and poor knowledge (Bao, 2019).

At that moment, many students dream of face-to-face learning. They were tired of online learning and wished to meet their friends in person and learn together in class. Face-to-face learning can promote students' participation and engage them to speak. The courage to communicate can be trained and increased by social interaction. When the government allowed students to learn at school, students showed considerable excitement. The engagement in the learning process also increased as students learned with their friends in the same place. The students became more active and did not remain silent in class. Surprisingly it only lasts for a while. When the government limits face-to-face learning, student participation drops, and the silence rate increases again.

Understanding students' reason for being silent is important. Teachers cannot easily judge students' silence without ensuring it. Silence can be very personal for students (Perkasa et al., 2022) and play an essential role in the academic journey (Hu, 2021). Bruneau in Bao (2019) classified silence into three major forms: psycholinguistic, interactive, and sociocultural. Psycholinguistic silence deals with hesitation to speak. Interactive silence can be understood as a space for thinking before speaking. Sociocultural silence is mostly related to the way of communication in society. Kurzon in Hu (2021) divides students' silence into two groups: intentional silence and unintentional silence. Intentional silence happens when students use certain strategies for certain reasons. In comparison, unintentional silence happens

unconsciously when they are anxious or ashamed. Maher & King (2020) mentioned that silence can affect students' emotions and thoughts if they see it as a worrying thing. Further, they also stated that teachers need to be more aware of students' silent behavior to overcome their anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Thus, teachers must find appropriate teaching strategies to minimize and break students' silence (Bahar et al., 2022).

Previous research on students' silence has been conducted several times. Hanh (2020) classified in-class students' silence into three factors: linguistics, psychological, and impersonal. In contrast, Bao (2021) conducted research on the silence perspective by examining five silence articles, grouping silence into ten types, namely painful silence, protective silence, personal silence, subjugated silence, neutral silence, helpful silence, adaptable silence, problem-solving silence, awkward silence, and individual versus collective silence. Kandilla et al. (2021) emphasize their research on teachers' perception of the students' silence and its impact on the teacher's decision for the teaching and learning process. They pointed out that students' silence is mostly caused by low self-motivation and low self-confidence, which can be solved by deciding the right teaching strategies to increase students' participation in the learning process. Huynh & Adams (2022) who conducted a study on teachers' perception of students' silence in Vietnam, found that students are being silenced to think and learn the material given by the teacher. Therefore, it can be annoying and give an uncertain feeling to the teachers when the silence is too long. Thus, they conclude that teachers need to link cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in facing students' silence.

On the other hand, Gangavarapu et al. (2022) who studied Indian students' silent behavior in online and offline classes, discovered that students' silence is created due to the lack of response after getting questions from the teachers. This condition is mostly related to the low self-confidence level that students possess. Nurrohmah & Waloyo (2021) who conducted a study on the correlation between silence and EFL online classes, revealed five reasons why students are silent during online learning. The factors are individual, teacher, cultural, technological, and domestic. Individual factors are related to students' motivation that needs to improve; the teacher factors are about the teaching method, which should be varied and interesting; cultural factors are about the need to create a positive learning culture, the technological factor is related to the issue of bad Internet connection, and domestic factors are student's condition at home which are noisy and not suitable for learning. In line with Nurrohmah & Waloyo, Hongboontri et al. (2021) who researched the reason for being silent in the Thailand context, also found four main reasons for students being silence during the EFL class, namely teachers, students, subject matter, and environment. Therefore, the present study focuses on determining students' reasons for being silent in different learning sets and today's condition as the prolonged effect on students' silent behavior.

METHOD

The study used qualitative research with an autoethnography method. An autoethnography method allows participants to be part of their research and explore topics of interest dialogically (Karas & Uchihara, 2021). It also empowers participants to personalize the investigation and conduct the research most beneficially. Autoethnography is not only writing about personal experiences but also conveys knowledge of how that experiential knowledge resonates with the world (Rinehart & Earl, 2016). The study method is also a critical perception that sees participants as an information source and knowledge construction (Fan et al., 2023).

The study participants were five students in grade eight from different classes, and the researcher herself was the English teacher for grade eight of junior high school. Although the number of participants does not meet the ideal number required, the study still offers a rich explanation as the teacher has experience teaching English for over five years. The sample

students are chosen purposively to represent the population. The purposive sampling technique helps the researcher to minimize the obstacle during the research and allow the researcher to get the real-time and desired results as the researcher can communicate them with the sample students directly (Bhardwaj, 2019).

The data collection used in the study is observation, narrative journaling, and a semi-constructed interview. The use of semi-structured interviews is to develop the flexibility of the research. The interviews were conducted at different times and recorded using mobile phones. The interview results were then transcript to make them more accessible for analysis. The data from observation and journaling of the narrative are transferred into field notes, enabling researchers to recall the memory better and avoid bias. All data are presented descriptively to show the actual condition clearly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Students' Silence in Online Learning

Students' participation in English classes online and offline learning is different. Back then, when students had to join online learning due to the covid19 outbreak, students showed less interest in the learning process. This condition happened for both synchronous and asynchronous classes. The teacher uses Zoom Meeting and Google Meet platforms for the synchronous class to deliver the lesson. The teacher also used various learning media such as presentation slides, YouTube videos, and digital learning websites like Kahoot and Word Wall. However, most students turned off the camera and muted the microphone all the time. They remain silent from the beginning until the end of the class.

Furthermore, for the asynchronous class, the teacher uses WhatsApp Group and Google Classroom to greet students and send the learning materials and activities. However, students also showed little attention to it by not showing any response to the teacher's messages. Some confused students sent a private message to ask for the teacher's explanation. Thus, the teacher must explain several times by replying to each message.

After several times of silence, the teacher tried to determine the students' reasons for being silent during both synchronous and asynchronous meetings during online learning. Student A said she dislikes online learning because it does not feel like learning. She listened to the teacher's explanation but chose not to respond as she was uninterested in the learning mode. She also mentioned that she has a bad image of online learning. Student B mentioned that he feared making mistakes when responding to the teacher's questions.

Further, he also mentioned that he had never met the teacher before, making him more nervous doing every action in the online learning process. Slightly different from the previous two students, student C said he remained silent because he did not understand the lesson. He explained that he could only concentrate on the lesson by listening and watching the screen directly and interacting with the teacher. On the other hand, students D and E pointed out that they were shy to speak in English as they were at home, and their parents or other family members might listen to them speaking in English. They explained further that English is a fully foreign language for their family, and none mastered it. Thus, they feared their family members would make fun of them.

Furthermore, based on the researcher's observation, the researcher agreed with the student's statement as seen from their low participation in online learning classes. The researcher, as their English teacher, always tried to motivate students to respond bravely to the lesson and try to speak in English. However, it was a great deal for them to do so. Students who are unconfident and afraid of making mistakes in speaking English are two main reasons for their silence. The

researcher also found that silence highly causes students' boredom with online learning during the lesson. Online learning takes a longer time than they expected. The teacher should consider students' mastery of English in responding to students' silence. Teachers' presence, guidance, and help are crucial in learning a foreign language. The teacher also needs to help students actively participate in the learning process by applying appropriate teaching strategies based on students' characteristics and needs in learning English.

Students' Silence in Face-to-face Learning

Having a condition of low case covid19 made the Indonesian government revoke the online learning policy and permit to open schools but in a limited class of face-to-face learning. The limited class of face-to-face learning can be understood by having half (50%) of students in the class during the offline learning process. This policy is taken for students' safeguarding. The limited class of face-to-face learning starts to change the students' behavior from passive to active learners. Slowly but surely, students start to engage in the learning process, and their silence reduces as they get involved in the learning process.

Compared with online learning, the students stated that face-to-face learning is more attractive and fun than online learning. Student B mentioned that seeing a real teacher in front of him increased his interest in learning English. Student A and C added that having the teacher explain the lesson directly helps them understand the English materials better and help them to overcome their confidence problem. In face-to-face learning, teachers have a great chance to use different kinds of learning activities and various learning media, which is beneficial to engage students in the learning process and help them to understand the lesson better. Once students understand the material and reduce their anxiety level in speaking English, they will start to speak and break the silence.

Although it was conducted in a limited class with only half of the students in a class, face-to-face learning is more effective and attractive for students to absorb the knowledge. The presence of their friends also helps them in the learning process. Students B, D, and E stated that they were no longer afraid of making mistakes as their friends shared the same understanding of the lesson. He also admitted that the presence of friends made them comfortable and brave enough to speak so they would not be silent anymore.

After several months of limited classes, the government permitted the school to open fully. Students get a chance to meet the whole class members. Surprisingly, students' engagement in the learning process increases, and their silence significantly decreases. They start to talk in small chunks and simple sentences. They also become braver in responding to any questions from the teacher and ask questions directly in front of other friends. Students A, D, and E explained that having the whole class members motivate them to learn because learning with friends is fun. Student B added that there is no point in being silent when learning with their classmates. Learning with friends is more fun and challenging for them. The presence of their friends helps each other to develop their skills, both cognitive and social.

Unfortunately, when the covid19 cases rise, students face the reality that the learning mode at school is back to the limited class of face-to-face learning. As a result, students' silence is significantly decreasing again. Students who start to be interested in learning lose their learning motivation. Students stated that the vibes of learning were weird when they returned to the limited face-to-face class. Student B added that there was an emptiness in the classroom. He did not have someone who sat beside him anymore, and his close friend was in a different group, which made them unable to learn in the same place and at the same time. The teacher tried to give some understanding of the current situation. However, it did not give the expected result as students stayed silent and did not respond to the teacher like before. Learning with friends, categorized as a social life skill, is essential for students. It can reduce students' anxiety

or fear of making mistakes in learning English. It also seemed that being silent was the only way to show their disappointment in the learning system.

Furthermore, from the teacher's perspective, the limited class of face-to-face learning made the teacher feel highly exhausted. The teachers must explain the lesson twice; for instance, there are five classes in grade eight, and then the students are divided into two groups in the limited face-to-face learning class, meaning that the teacher must explain the lesson ten times. The teacher must spend more time and extra energy to teach students. It impacts the teacher's quality in conducting the teaching process. It should be admitted that sometimes teachers also choose to be silent because of this matter.

Discussion

Students' silence during the online learning process and limited class of face-to-face learning had big impacts on students' present behavior. The whole year of online learning condition, followed by a limited class of face-to-face learning in the next year, hit students' mentality and behavior in learning. The sample students representing the population of SMP Muhammadiyah Bantul students are not ready to follow and actively participate in the online learning system and choose to remain silent during the learning process. The short but feels long duration of online and limited classes of face-to-face learning which increases students' silence, proved to change students' behavior in learning. Based on the researcher's observation, two significant effects are caused by students' prolonged silence during the previous learning modes in the English classes.

Firstly, students' cognitive skills and competencies in English are not developed. English as a foreign language for Indonesian students urge them to practice more on the target language in order to master the language. However, the prolonged silence the students showed affected their English performances. Students do not show good participation during the English learning process. They did not participate actively in the learning activities in group, peer, or individual activities. They also seemed hesitant to share their understanding or opinion orally and became silent. Consequently, students find difficulties in learning English as they do not have enough practice time, which affects their English capabilities.

Secondly, students do not have good social skills. As students are always silent, they rarely interact with their friends and the teacher. Some students even said they did not know other students from different classes. This condition is also much influenced by the limitation of interaction in the previous learning system, which has become part of student's behavior for the present time. Furthermore, mask use also becomes students' weapon to justify their silence. In the students' perception, wearing a mask is similar to wearing armor. They prevent themselves from interacting with others when they do not know what to say or are not interested in certain things, including learning English. As a result, students stayed silent as they found difficulties communicating and interacting with others.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that students have several reasons for being silent in the English language classroom. Naturally, they are unintentionally silent during the learning process, but then it becomes part of their behavior, affecting their competencies until now. Before judging, the teacher must understand several possible reasons behind the students' silence. Afraid of making mistakes in speaking English still becomes the number one common reason for students to be silent. However, teachers should consider the previous condition of online learning in understanding students' silence. Face-to-face learning is proven to promote students' participation in the learning process. Students can learn with the teacher and other friends in real-time and places. Students' motivation to learn English can be increased when they can

learn with their friends to create a good, fun, and challenging learning atmosphere. The presence of friends and teachers made students feel more confident and easily engaged in the learning process without hesitating to talk. The teacher must also design the English class creatively by applying appropriate strategies and activities. By doing so, the teacher can overcome students' prolonged silence and help them to improve their cognitive skills in English and social skills with people in their surroundings, including the teacher and other students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to thank the participants for giving valid data for the study.

REFERENCES

- Bahar, Purwati, O., & Setiawan, S. (2022). Exploring teacher power use and student silence in an EFL classroom: Evidence from Indonesia. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 12(2), 157–165. <https://doi.org/10.47750/pegegog.12.02.16>
- Bao, D. (2019). The place of silence in second language acquisition. *English Language Teaching and Research Journal (ELTAR-J)*, 1(1), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.33474/eltar-j.v1i1.4771>
- Bao, D. (2021). Silence seen through different lenses. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 1(1), 1–8.
- Bhardwaj, P. (2019). Types of sampling in research. *Journal of the Practice of Cardiovascular Sciences*, 5(3), 157–163. https://doi.org/10.4103/jpcs.jpcs_62_19
- Fan, H., Li, B., Pasaribu, T., & Chowdhury, R. (2023). Online interviews as new methodological normalcy and a space of ethics : An autoethnographic investigation into covid-19 educational research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004231176283>
- Gangavarapu, S. L., Mutyala, U., & Chada, R. R. (2022). Investigating Indian ESL learners' silent behaviour in response to oral tasks in online and offline classes. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 1(2), 46–56. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v1i2.24>
- Hanh, N. T. (2020). Silence is gold?: A study on students' silence in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(4), 153–160. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v9n4p153>
- Hongboontri, C., Wittaya, I., & Boonyaprakob, K. (2021). Silence in an EFL Classroom: The interplay of Schwab's four commonplaces. *Suranaree Journal of Social Science*, 15(1), 128–146.
- Hu, J. (2021). Toward the role of EFL/ESL students' silence as a facilitative element in their success. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(737123), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.737123>
- Huynh, H.-H., & Adams, M. (2022). Vietnamese teacher educators' perceptions of silence during online English as a Foreign Language classes. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 1(2), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v1i2.10>
- Kandilla, D. P., Dewi, N. S. N., & Pujasari, R. S. (2021). Teacher's perception of students' silence in EFL classroom: A case study. *Teaching & Learning English in Multicultural Contexts (TLEMC)*, 5(1), 20–34. <http://jurnal.unsil.ac.id/index.php/tlemc/index>
- Karas, M., & Uchihara, T. (2021). Silence: A duoethnography. *Journal of Silence Studies in Education*, 1(1), 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.31763/jsse.v1i1.5>
- Maher, K., & King, J. (2020). Observing anxiety in the foreign language classroom: Student silence and nonverbal cues. *Journal for the Psychology of Language Learning*, 2(1), 116–141. <https://doi.org/10.52598/jpll/2/1/6>

- Nurrohmah, Z. Q. A., & Waloyo, A. A. (2021). The correlation between silence phenomenon and EFL student online class. *English Learning Innovation*, 2(2), 62–74. <https://doi.org/10.22219/englie.v2i2.17736>
- Perkasa, A. B., Savitri, D., & Yogyantoro, Y. (2022). Anxiety-related silence in speaking among Indonesian EFL junior high school students. *Ahmad Dahlan Journal of English Studies*, 9(2), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.26555/adjes.v9i2.145>
- Rinehart, R. E., & Earl, K. (2016). Auto-, duo- and collaborative-ethnographies: “caring” in an audit culture climate. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 16(3), 210–224. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-04-2016-0024>
- Singh, N. (2011). Student-centered learning (SCL) in classrooms — A comprehensive overview. *Educational Quest*, 2(2), 275–282.
- Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice*. Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint.
- Zafarina, N. F. (2022). Silent learners’ voices: Exploring the silence behavior in Indonesian EFL Classroom. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 7(2), 349–363. <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v7i2.846>