

Exploring the Psychological Factors that Cause the Silence in EFL College Classroom

Ahmed Mohamed Fahid

University of Misan, College of Basic Education
Department of English, Iraq
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0727-5697>

DOI: 10.37648/ijps.v17i01.002

¹Received: 19 Nov 2023; Accepted: 10 Jan 2024; Published: 15 Jan 2024

ABSTRACT

Many researchers and scholars have studied the phenomenon of classroom silence. It has been considered as some sort of barrier that stops in the way of students and teachers' interaction. This barrier affects and holds the process that leads to the success of teaching goals in classroom. Furthermore, classroom silence can affect the ability of students to cultivate a language. The main aim of the current study is to investigate the psychological factors that could lead to this silence as well as the methods that can be used to improve the atmosphere of teaching classroom in order to break this silence. With accordance to these factors that lead to this phenomenon, some suggestions are put forward to get over this teaching barrier. These suggestions can be summed into raising students' self-esteem confidence and creating harmonious classroom atmosphere. Just by examining the physiological factors that led to the classroom silence such as fear of negative feedback, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, lack of confidence and lack of motivation.

Keywords: *Classroom; silence; College English; psychological Factors*

PROBLEM OF STUDY

One of the main and most important elements of English language proficiency is speaking. However, due to various factors, students tend to encounter some obstacles concerning speaking and interacting with teachers in classroom. Most of these factors are psychological which can be related to students 'fear of rejection, making mistakes and lack of confidence (Mahripah, 2014). Morita (2004) said that students who underestimated their selves as unintelligent and not smart could become silent. Consequently, they chose silence over speaking and interacting in class. So the current study aims at identifying these psychological factors that lead to this phenomenon to give some suggestions to get over them (McKay, 2008).

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The present study aims at:

1. Identifying the psychological factors that cause classroom phenomenon in EFL college classroom.
2. Presenting a number of suggestions that can be useful to overcome this problem.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The value of study lies in that it studies a phenomenon that cause obstacles to the educational process and create a sort of a barrier that hold back the ability of students to interact and learn properly. It studies the psychological factors that lead to the silence in classroom, therefore, it will make it easier for students and teachers to understand how this problem occurs and how they can overcome it.

¹ How to cite the article: Fahid A.M (January 2024); Exploring the Psychological Factors that Cause the Silence in EFL College Classroom; International Journal of Professional Studies; Jan-Jun 2024, Vol 17, 9-15; DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijps.v17i01.002>

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study are second year EFL Iraqi college students from English department at Missan college of education. The academic year 2021-2022

INTRODUCTION

Definitions of Silence

According to Levinson (1983), silence can be defined as the complete despairing of vocalization. Levinson argues that silence indicate creating no sound in a definite place. Saville-Troike (1985) explained that silence “is non-verbal and non-fixed act of communication shown by the subject of the communication.” Conversely, silence is considered anon verbal communication, while it can be seen as a verbal in some certain interactive event. Furthermore; silence can also be identified as a form of speech act, that is in cases where there is an intentional communicative function. Thus, silence works as part of the verbal code.

Bilmes (1994: 79) argues that “there are as many kinds of silence as there are of relevant sound”. He defines silence based on two main parts, the first one is the simple absence of sound which he calls ‘absolute silence’, and the relevant absence of a particular kind of sound, which he calls ‘notable silence’. The second type has another sub-type which is the absence of (relevant) talk and is labelled by Bilmes as ‘conversational silence’

Based on the mentioned definitions, silence is reflection of soundless communication and it is see as non-verbal behavior. Students tend to show this behavior in classroom. There are two types of silence divided based on the degree of effectiveness of classroom silence. The first type is the positive silence which means the period when students get silent in order to think of an answer for a question. While the negative silence indicates some sort of an emotional state where students tend to be uninterested and don’t have the desire to participate in the learning contents (Teng, 2009). Silence inside the classroom could come as a result of high levels of anxiety (associated with students' lack of confidence) in the classroom and this is not effected by students’ cultural background and the teaching objectives.

The Psychological Perspectives of Silence

Human and communication are inseparable, human need communication as integral part of their existence. This process takes place when a person uses firstly his inner self. In other words, communication cannot take place effectively unless the person has an awareness and knowledge of his inner-self. Inner-self can be reached only when the person connected communicatively with others. The Inner emotions and dialogues play crucial part in forming the social self and connects this self to the world and the psyche (Lemke, 1995: 89). With all this in mind, it can say that learners tend to reject learning because of their self-pride and the hidden self of theirs. According Pitt (2000: 65) there exist a hidden and secret self-inside each person. Therefore, we need to listen to the silences behind the words. In other words, taking signs that exists among lines into consideration. As psychoanalytic theory states:

“for even in the silence of the untold story, the unconscious speaks.”

It is not an easy task to break the silence in the classroom. For a person to figure out his inner soul is crucially important so he can understand his/herself and his identity. Winnicott (1967) argues in order for a person to be emotionally healthy they need to be themselves. When the person does not feel himself or feel like he is not his true self then they with turn to choose silence. Winnicot (1967: 33) also discusses this perspective and considered it as a sign of denial. It appears when a human feels unreal or they feel they are not themselves. In classroom, this phenomenon shows when individual students don’t feel belong or they feel eliminated from the team. Students’ interactions in the classroom are crucial and demanded for the success of any learning process and this interaction can be highly improved when their listening and speaking skills are enhanced.

Research Procedures

This chapter includes a description of the procedures that were adopted to achieve the objectives of the research, starting with defining the research population, selecting an appropriate sample, choosing a research tool to achieve its objectives and processing its data by appropriate statistical means.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research relied on the descriptive research method, which is the most widely used research method, especially in the field of educational research, as the descriptive method is concerned with revealing the relationships between two or more variables in identifying the extent of the correlation between these variables and expressing it as a safe through the correlation coefficient.

Research Population

The research population means the elements that the researcher seeks to generalize about the research results related to the problem in question. The current population consists of EFL Iraqi college students for the academic year 2021 – 2022 at the English Department.

The Research Instrument

For the purpose of achieving the objective of the research; The questionnaire was prepared as a research tool, and it has been preparing. According to the following steps:

A- Poll Questionnaire

The researcher prepared an open questionnaire, prepared an open questionnaire addressed to the EFL students at the education college, English Department. The questionnaires are divided into two forms based on the type of factors that lead to students' silence in class:

- 1- Psychological factors related to the teachers and classroom environment
- 2- Factors related to students' psychology

B. The Validity

The validity of the tool indicates the extent to which the test content represents the behavioral range of the trait to be inferred.

In order to ensure the validity of the tool, the apparent validity was adopted by presenting the questionnaire's paragraphs to a group of experts specialized in the field of educational and psychological sciences to express their views on the validity of the tool, and after collecting the opinions of the experts, the researcher adopted the percentage of "80% and above for the validity, and in light of the experts' opinions and observations, some paragraphs were modified linguistically, and with the questionnaire remained after the experts' report due to the validity of its items.

The Final Application:

The researcher applied the questionnaire to the research sample consisting of (45) college students

a. The First Questionnaire

Psychological factors related to teachers in classroom environment

The main question of the following questionnaire is "What are the reasons behind students' silence in EFL classes?" from teacher's perspective.

Table (1) percentages and frequencies of students' responses

Item	Agree		Strongly Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc
Lack of daily preparation by students	18	40%	10	22.22%	8	17.7%	4	8.8%	5	11.1%
Family problems, especially between parents, are negatively reflected on students	20	44.44%	15	33.33%	2	4.4%	5	11.11%	3	6.66%
The excessive use of social media and video games by students which keep their mind busy during class	16	35.55%	11	24.44%	8	17.77%	6	13.3%	4	8.88%
The load of homework given to students	10	22.22%	25	55.55%	3	6.66%	2	4.44%	5	11.11%
Students lack of concentration during	15	33.33%	10	22.22%	7	15.55%	8	17.77%	5	11.11%

class because they chat with other students										
Teachers negative attitude toward students when they make mistakes	13	28.88%	27	60%	2	4.44%	3	6.66%	0	0.0%
The lack of confidence between students themselves	7	15.55%	8	17.77	5	11.11%	20	44.44%	5	11.11%
Teacher is incorporate and tend to embarrasses students	10	22.22%	19	42.22%	6	13.33%	8	17.77%	2	4.44%
The subject material is boring	12	26.66%	15	33.33%	7	15.55%	6	13.33%	5	11.11%
The way teacher introduces the lesson is tedious	17	37.77%	14	31.11%	4	8.88%	6	13.33%	4	8.88%
Low self-esteem teachers	14	31.11%	26	57.77%	0	0.0%	4	8.88	1	2.22%
Fear of negative trails	15	33.33%	25	55.55%	1	2.22%	2	4.44%	2	4.44%
Fear of losing face in front of teacher and other students	13	28.88%	24	53.33%	2	4.44%	1	2.22%	4	8.88%
Fear of negative evaluation	16	35.55%	26	57.77%	0	0.00%	2	4.44%	1	2.22%
Lack of motivation from teachers	11	24.44%	23	51.11%	3	6.66%	6	13.33%	2	4.44%

Factors related to teachers and classroom environment

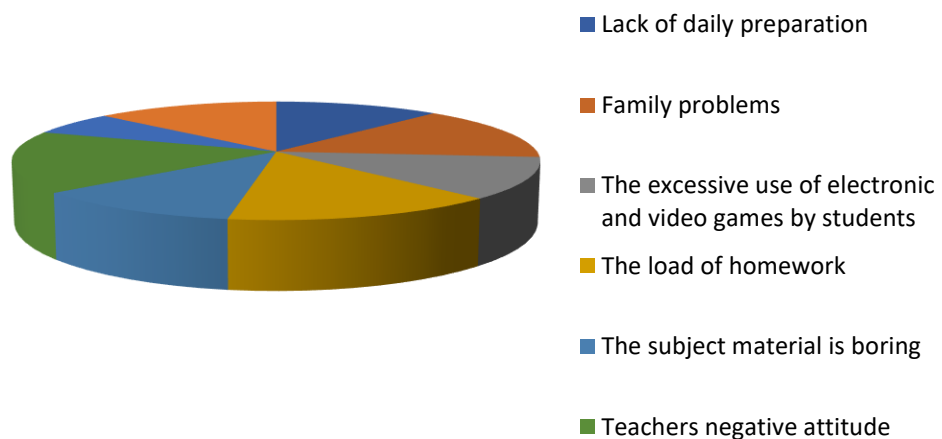


Figure (2) Factors related to teachers and classroom environment

Questionnaire (2) Psychological Factors related to Students

Item	Agree		Strongly Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc
I lack self-confidence and I think teacher would rebuke me and my classmates would laugh.	9	20%	18	40%	7	15.55%	10	22.22%	1	2.22%
I think my language skills and competence are not sufficient	11	24.44%	14	31.11%	9	20%	8	17.77%	3	6.66%
I think my English pronunciation is poor and can't be used in class activities	6	31.33%	10	22.22%	5	11.11%	17	37.77%	7	15.55%
I get anxious during the class which makes me nervous and unable to participate in class activities	12	26.66%	28	62.22%	1	2.22%	4	8.88%	0	0.00
I think I can't express what I want to say correctly and effectively	13	28.88%	23	51.11%	4	8.88%	5	11.11%	0	0.00%
I believe keeping silent in class would make me looks prudent and modest	8	17.77%	12	26.66%	9	20%	10	22.22%	6	13.33%
I don't have the desire to learn English	8	17.77%	10	22.22%	7	15.55%	15	33.33%	5	11.11%
I don't feel motivated to participate in class	7	15.55%	14	31.11%	8	17.77%	11	24.44%	5	11.11%
I think my answers wouldn't be accurate that's why I avoid participation	10	22.22%	24	53.33%	6	13.33%	5	11.11%	0	0.00
I feel shy when speak English in class	13	28.88%	29	64.44%	3	6.66%	0	0.00	0	0.00
Lacking of confidence prevent me from using English	15	33.33%	25	55.55%	2	4.44%	3	6.66%	0	0.00
I fear to make mistake while speaking	12	26.66%	26	57.77%	5	11.11%	2	4.44%	0	0.00
I worry about whether or not others understand my speaking	11	24.44%	27	60%	1	2.22%	3	6.66%	3	6.66%

Despite the fact that such mean of analysis has clearly proved that Iraqi EFL students are in fact affected by number of factors which prevented them from participating class and choose silence instead. In order to prove these results,

the researcher attempted to check hypothetical mean and the arithmetic mean and along with the standard deviation of the sample's responses. After that, a T-test is conducted and the results are clarified in table (3):

Type of factors	Arithmetic Mean	Std. Deviation	Calculated value	Tabulated values	Significance level
External factors	62.93	7.903	2.03	2.19	0.05
Psychological factors	64.08	8.063			

Table (3) shows clearly that the tabulated value is higher than the calculated value with a significance level (0.05). These numbers clearly reveal that there are no differences between these two mean values of the factors lead to silence. These results contrast with what is expected as psychological factors were expected to be the most influential on the students' silence. It has been found that student's inner thoughts or psychological state along with the class environment that includes teachers are the main reasons that lead to silence in class. These psychological factors mainly include anxiety, self-esteem and motivation.

Psychological Factors related to Students

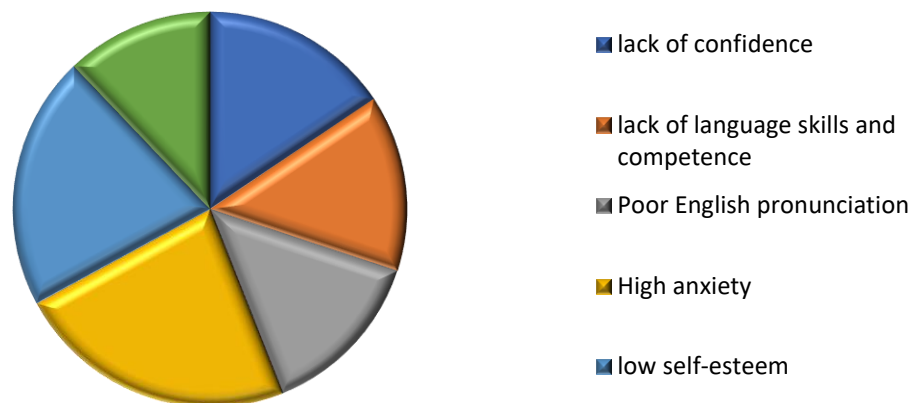


Figure (1) Psychological Factors that cause students' silence

RESULTS

The analysis of the data clearly revealed that the factors that cause students' silence can be both external and internal. External factors involved the surrounding environment of the learning process. Internal which involves the students' inner thoughts and psychology that could affect him negatively and results in silence. As the results shows, 44.44% of the participants agree that it's the lack of students' daily preparation that may lead to their silence in the class. While 55.55% of them strongly believe it is the load of homework given to student that leads to this phenomenon. Teachers can also play a negative role sometimes by reinforcing this phenomenon when they show a negative attitude toward students making mistake. On the other hand, there is the students' related psychological factors such as shyness which 64.44% of students agreed that it caused them to be silent. Other psychological factors that cause students' silence can be summarized into lack confidence, low self-esteem teachers, fear of negative feedback and lack of motivation are most influential psychological factors that cause students to be silent in classroom. Additionally, other factors such as the classroom environment, classmates' familiarity with each other and the teacher's attitude toward students' mistakes play an equal role in enhancing the students' silence.

CONCLUSION

Silence phenomenon is considered to be a double edged in the sense that it can has a positive and negative effect in the same time. Silence can be positive when the students get silent to think more deeply and to give a better answer. While it also viewed as a negative phenomenon in the classroom that can obstacles the interaction in the classroom and make the process of learning more difficult. Clearly, it essential for students to interact and engage in the

classroom as this would result in better understanding and fast acquisition of English language. Therefore, the current research has investigated the psychological factors that could lead to the emerging of this phenomenon in classroom. The main psychological factors the study deals with are anxiety, self-esteem and motivation. These are the main psychological factors that students suffer from and are believed to cause silence in classroom. Additionally, the study took into consideration the other external factors that could also lead to this phenomenon. These factors include classroom environment including classmates and teachers and conducted a questionnaire for each type of factors. The results clearly indicate that silence in classroom can be caused by various psychological factors which can be related to the students himself or to the classroom environment. To sum up everything that have been stated so far, it can be said that the most influential psychological factors that lead to silence in classroom are shyness, lack of confidence, high levels of anxiety, fear of negative feedback and fear of making mistakes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With accordance to the results of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Conducting a study to examine the linguistics factors that cause silence in classroom
2. Teachers should pay more attention to the psychological impact that his actions could leave on students
3. There should more focus on enhancing self-esteem and confidence of the students

REFERENCES

1. Bosacki, S. L. (2005). The culture of classroom silence. New York: Peter Lang.
2. Bilmes, J. (1994). Constituting silence: Life in the world of total meaning. *Semiotica*, 98(1-2), 73-88.
3. Lemke, J.L. (1995) Textual Politics: Discourse and Social Dynamics. Washington: Taylor and Francis.
4. Levinson, S. C. (1983). Pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Mahripah, Siti. (2014). Exploring Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Speaking Performance: From Theories to Practice. Proceedings of The 3rd UAD
6. Mahripah, Siti. (2014). Exploring Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Speaking Performance: From Theories to Practice. Proceedings of The 3rd UAD
7. McKay, P. (2008). Assessing Young Language Learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. McKay, P. (2008). Assessing Young Language Learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Pitt, A.J. (2000) Hide and seek: The play of the personal in education. *Changing English: Studies in Reading and Culture* 7 (1), 65-74.
10. Saville-Troike, M. (1985). The place of silence in an integrated theory of communication. In D. Tannen & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on silence* (pp.3-18). Norwood, NJ: Ablex
11. Teng, M. H. (2009). Teacher factors in college English classroom. *Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education*, (4), 146-148
12. Winnicott, D.W. (1967) The concept of a healthy individual. In *Home is Where We Start from: Essays by a psychoanalyst* (pp. 21-38). New York; London: W.W. Norton.