EXPLORING THE CAUSES OF STUDENTS' SILENCE IN EFL CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

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Abstract. Students' silence during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom discussions is a common challenge that limits oral communication development. Although learners often possess sufficient linguistic knowledge, many of them hesitate to participate in speaking activities. This study explores the main causes of students' silence through a qualitative review of existing literature. The findings reveal that silence is not caused by language deficiency alone but is influenced by psychological, pedagogical, cognitive and social factors. Anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, teacher-centered instruction and unclear task design are among the key barriers. The study also suggests that supportive teaching strategies can significantly improve learners' willingness to communicate.

Keywords: EFL classroom, speaking reluctance, willingness to communicate, foreign language anxiety, classroom interaction.

Introduction. Speaking is one of the most essential skills in foreign language learning, as it enables learners to express ideas and participate in communication. In EFL classroom settings, speaking activities and discussions are commonly used to develop communicative competence. However, despite its importance, many students remain silent and show limited participation.

This issue has been widely studied in second language acquisition research. Earlier explanations focused mainly on linguistic limitations such as insufficient vocabulary or grammar knowledge. However, recent studies argue that silence in the classroom cannot be explained only by language ability. Instead, it is influenced by psychological, pedagogical and contextual factors.

MacIntyre emphasizes that willingness to communicate is a situational construct influenced by confidence, classroom environment and interactional conditions. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner highlight that anxiety plays a crucial role in reducing learners' oral participation. Therefore, understanding these factors is important for improving classroom interaction and teaching effectiveness.

Literature Review. The phenomenon of students' silence in EFL classrooms has been examined from multiple perspectives. One of the most influential concepts is willingness to communicate [8], which explains learners' readiness to engage in communication depending on situational variables.

Foreign language anxiety is another major factor. MacIntyre and Gardner define it as an emotional reaction that negatively affects language performance [9]. Learners experiencing anxiety often avoid speaking due to fear of mistakes or negative evaluation. Hamouda also found that lack of confidence and fear of teacher correction are common reasons for student silence [4].

Teacher behavior is another important factor. Landsman argues that forced participation and strict correction methods may reduce students' motivation to speak [6]. Instead of encouraging communication, such practices increase pressure.

From a cognitive perspective, speaking requires complex mental processing. Gass, Mackey and Pica emphasize that interaction and input are essential for language development [3]. Krashen also states that learners acquire language more effectively when exposed to comprehensible input [5].

Classroom environment is also crucial. Fleming and Younger note that positive environments increase confidence and participation [2]. Larson and Parker further emphasize that open discussions promote interaction and reduce fear [7].

Motivation and self-confidence are key factors. Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels found that confident learners are more likely to participate in communication activities, while low-confidence learners remain silent [1].

Cultural and linguistic awareness is also important in language education. It is highlighted that aphorisms represent an essential part of the national-cultural component of language learning, which helps students connect language with real-life meaning [10],[12]. Furthermore, methodological studies emphasize the importance of aphorisms in foreign language teaching, particularly in improving students' engagement and motivation [13]. Teaching idioms enhances communicative competence and makes language learning more practical and meaningful [11]. These findings support the idea that innovative teaching materials can increase students' willingness to participate in speaking activities.

Methods. This research is conducted through qualitative literature analysis. Previously published studies in second language acquisition, educational psychology and classroom interaction were examined and synthesized. The analysis focuses on four interconnected dimensions: pedagogical practices, cognitive processing, affective factors and sociocultural context. This approach enables a holistic interpretation of the problem by integrating different theoretical perspectives rather than relying on a single explanation.

Results and Discussion. The analysis shows that students' silence in EFL classroom discussions is caused by multiple interacting factors.

Pedagogical factors play a major role. Teachers who require immediate responses without preparation often increase anxiety. Landsman explains that forced participation reduces willingness to communicate [6]. Negative correction strategies also lower student confidence.

Cognitive factors are related to task difficulty. Speaking in a foreign language requires simultaneous processing of ideas and language structures. When tasks are unclear, students experience cognitive overload and prefer silence [4].

Affective factors such as anxiety and low self-confidence strongly influence participation. MacIntyre and Gardner state that anxiety disrupts cognitive processing and reduces performance [9]. Clement et al. highlight the importance of self-confidence in communication [1].

Sociocultural factors also affect participation. In some contexts, students are not encouraged to express opinions freely. Peer pressure and fear of judgment reduce speaking behavior. Fleming and Younger suggest that supportive environments can overcome these barriers [2].

To improve participation, teachers should use structured speaking tasks, provide preparation time, and encourage group work. These strategies reduce pressure and increase confidence.

Conclusion. The findings of this study indicate that students' silence in EFL classroom discussions is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by pedagogical, cognitive, affective and sociocultural variables. Rather than being a consequence of insufficient linguistic competence,

learners' reluctance to participate is primarily associated with classroom interaction patterns, emotional constraints and instructional design. The analysis suggests that teacher-centered practices, inadequate task clarity and evaluative pressure significantly hinder learners' willingness to communicate. In contrast, pedagogical approaches that emphasize learner autonomy, interactional support and reduced anxiety contribute to increased oral participation.

In conclusion, addressing students' silence requires a shift toward learner-centered pedagogy that integrates affective support with communicative opportunities. Future research should further investigate empirically validated instructional interventions that enhance willingness to communicate in EFL contexts.

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