

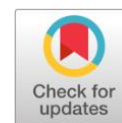
# The investigation of in-class silence behavior among adult EFL learners: A case study at a private University in Yogyakarta

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## ABSTRACT

In the context of a foreign language classroom, oral participation is essential. The process will not be fully complete until students are willing to express their ideas and speak up to demonstrate their understanding. Students tend to stay silent more than participate in class discussions. This behavior is also known as silence. Therefore, if students do not participate in the teaching and learning process, they cannot effectively master English. This research aims to investigate the underlying factors contributing to the lack of verbal participation within the English as a Foreign Language course at the university level and analyze which difficulties students find most influential in their silence in EFL classrooms. This research used qualitative methods, the participants in this study were students of Speaking in Professional Context class, consisting of 5 students, 3 female students, and 2 male students. The selected participants were students who tended to be silent and did not participate in class during the observation activities. Observations were conducted to find out directly the situation during the class and interviews were conducted to collect data for analysis. The research results showed that student silence in speaking classes was caused by eight factors, divided into two categories: lecturer factors and student factors. Lecturers who have an assertive personality can create an intimidating atmosphere, while unsupportive or overly critical assessments can lead to student fear. From the students' side, fear of making mistakes, especially in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage, can be a major factor. Lack of vocabulary can hinder students' ability to convey ideas effectively. Not understanding the learning material can also discourage students from participating. Low self-confidence and introverted personalities can also affect the level of engagement in class.



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## 1. Introduction

English a globally spoken language, is extensively taught and learned in numerous countries, including Indonesia, due to the demands of globalization. Proficiency in English has become essential for effective communication across various domains such as business, technology, entertainment, and tourism. However, the lack of verbal participation from students in English classrooms raises concerns about the effectiveness of teaching methods and classroom dynamics. This phenomenon, termed

"classroom disengagement," can hinder language acquisition and create conflicts within educational settings. While silence in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom may not always be negative, it often presents a significant obstacle to skill development. Efforts to encourage active engagement among EFL learners are crucial for enhancing their English communication skills. In Indonesia, many foreign language students are hesitant to participate orally in class, leading to minimal engagement and hindering language mastery. This behavior, known as silence, prevents students from fully benefiting from the teaching and learning process, ultimately impeding their English proficiency.

Silence in the classroom is often seen as students refraining from verbal communication or responding to teacher inquiries. A study by Kandila et al. (2021) suggests that silence can diminish or exclude individuals or groups from participating in an encounter. While silence may sometimes occur as a part of classroom engagement, it can also result from specific circumstances. The issue of students' silence is crucial as it can impact their academic language proficiency and may lead to conflicts between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves (Altuntas, 2014). Moreover, it could impede language acquisition. However, the absence of verbal communication should not always be seen as detrimental. Some students, despite understanding the subject matter well, may be hesitant to display their oral proficiency in a public setting.

Silence, as described by Juniati (2022), is characterized by a lack of communication and connection with others, posing challenges for students to articulate their thoughts, especially on specific subjects, within the classroom environment. Hanh's study (2020) study investigates this phenomenon among Japanese EFL learners, revealing various interconnected factors such as linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural elements contributing to student silence. Recognizing the importance of maintaining silence, teachers implement strategies to foster an active classroom environment. However, passive behavior and reluctance to engage persist among students, hindering communication and learning. While silence can offer benefits, such as creating space for reflection and expansion, scholars like Gunawan (2019) argue that it poses a significant threat to language learning success due to the absence of verbal communication. Therefore, active participation is essential for students to enhance their foreign language skills (Bista, 2012).

Speaking is a crucial language skill in English learning, involving the production of verbal communication to convey meaning. Bao (2021) highlights various speaking activities such as discussion and public speaking, emphasizing the importance of active participation and sharing opinions. Public speaking, as described by Bahar et al. (2022) involves delivering a speech before an audience, while group discussion facilitates the exchange of experiences and opinions among participants (Martínez Agudo, 2018). In speaking classes, students are encouraged to move beyond memorization and silence, actively engaging in discussions and expressing their viewpoints. It's not merely about delivering memorized content but understanding and articulating ideas effectively to communicate well, reflecting the essence of public speaking. Therefore, active participation and comprehension are integral for students to improve their speaking skills and effectively convey information.

In Indonesia learning English poses challenges as it is treated as a foreign language, primarily used within educational settings rather than in daily life, limiting opportunities for practical application. This scarcity of English usage outside the classroom makes it challenging for Indonesian students to master the language, particularly in speaking skills. Moreover, silence among students exacerbates this issue, hindering productivity and indicating various underlying issues such as inattention, lack of interest, or incompetence (Bao, 2021). Hanna (2021) suggests that student silence may signal resistance to engaging verbally with teachers, while Andrews et al. (2020) attribute it to a lack of respect for lectures or resistance to classroom instructions. Kusmallah and Ghorashi (2024) further add that silence could be a protest against unfavorable teaching styles. Additionally, Heitzer et al. (2021) correlate student silence with low educational achievement and an inability to develop cognition independently. Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures to encourage active engagement and foster an environment conducive to language learning and student participation.

The present study sought to understand the underlying reasons for students' silence and the implications for classroom dynamics. Malik et al. (2021) identify three key factors contributing to student silence: psychological, linguistic, and socio-cultural. Psychological factors such as fears related to language proficiency and concerns about making mistakes contribute to students' hesitancy

to speak. Linguistic challenges, including vocabulary limitations and difficulties with grammar and pronunciation, further inhibit verbal expression. Additionally, socio-cultural factors, including classroom environment and lecturer support, play a crucial role in motivating students to actively participate in English conversations. Conversely, Woodward (2023) suggests that student silence can be beneficial for language learning, providing opportunities for attentive listening, contemplation, and idea reformulation, highlighting the nuanced nature of silence and its varied interpretations within educational settings.

Silence within the classroom can manifest in different forms, each with its implications. Bao (2021) distinguishes between awkward silence, which can disrupt learning when instructional activities fail to elicit responses, and neutral silence, which can be misinterpreted by participants and impact audience perceptions in oral presentations. Moreover, student silence can stem from anxiety, particularly fear of language errors or negative judgment, as well as cultural influences promoting humility and respect. Despite the challenges posed by silence, Andolina and Conklin (2021) propose that it can serve as a valuable learning tool, fostering attentive listening and reflection. Ultimately, understanding the complexities of student silence is essential for creating inclusive and effective learning environments in EFL classrooms.

## 2. Literature Review

The discourse related to the same topic of this article falls into three areas, that is, student reticence in verbal participation has been approached by researchers from three distinctive angles, namely the quest for remedial strategies, the focus on teacher role and class environment, and cultural influences over students' learning engagement. Below is a discussion of how these themes have been tackled through empirical effort. After that, the review will highlight all the gaps in reticence research as implicated by all the projects reported in this literature section.

### 2.1. Strategies to overcome reticence in EFL classrooms

Research by Aripin and Umam (2019) explores strategies to help students overcome reticence in speaking activities in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. Key findings include the importance of creating a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment, the use of group activities and pair work to increase student confidence, and the role of the teacher in providing feedback and encouragement to help students improve their speaking skills. The article emphasizes the need for creativity and flexibility in teaching practices to effectively address student reticence in speaking activities.

Donald's (2010) project on the phenomenon of reticence in ESL classrooms and strategies to help students overcome it found the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, providing opportunities for practice and feedback, and encouraging student participation through group activities and discussions. The article highlights the role of the teacher in fostering a positive learning environment and helping students build confidence in speaking English.

Liu and Jackson (2011) present a case study on reticence and anxiety in oral English lessons in China. Key findings include the prevalence of reticence and anxiety among Chinese learners in English-speaking activities, which can hinder their participation and speaking proficiency. The study discusses factors contributing to reticence and anxiety, such as cultural influences, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence in speaking English. The authors suggest strategies to address these challenges, including creating a supportive learning environment, encouraging student participation, and providing opportunities for practice and feedback to help Chinese learners overcome their reticence and improve their oral English skills.

Riadil (2020) focuses on a qualitative study investigating EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' self-confidence to reduce reticence in speaking abilities. Key findings include the significance of self-confidence in overcoming reticence among EFL learners and the impact it has on their speaking skills. The study underscores the importance of nurturing and boosting students' self-confidence through various strategies to help them become more confident and proficient speakers. The findings highlight the correlation between self-confidence and speaking ability and suggest that enhancing

Drawn from these projects, recommendations for remedying student reticence include the need to create a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment is crucial to help students overcome reticence in speaking activities in EFL classrooms; incorporate confidence-building activities, such as role-plays and discussions; and gradually increase the complexity of speaking tasks can aid students in gaining confidence in speaking English.

## 2.2. Role of teacher and classroom environment

Cutrone's study (2009) discovers ways to help Japanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners overcome their fear of speaking. Key findings include the importance of creating a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment, incorporating confidence-building activities such as role-plays and discussions, and gradually increasing the complexity of speaking tasks to help students gain confidence. The author suggests that providing positive reinforcement and opportunities for student interaction can help alleviate students' fear of speaking in the EFL classroom.

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Ellwood and Nakane (2009) examine the privileging of speech in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and mainstream university classrooms, providing a critical evaluation of participation. Key findings include the dominance of spoken communication as the primary mode of participation in these settings, potentially disadvantaging students with different communication styles or language abilities. The authors suggest that a more inclusive approach to participation, recognizing and valuing diverse forms of communication, can help create a more equitable learning environment in EAP and university classrooms.

Granger (2013) explores the dynamics of silence and participation in language classrooms. Key findings include the recognition of silence as a form of communication that can indicate various factors such as contemplation, lack of confidence, or disagreement. The author emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing the reasons for student silence in the classroom to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Additionally, the article highlights the role of the teacher in facilitating and encouraging student participation while also respecting the value of silence as a communicative tool.

Kurihara (2006) explores the impact of classroom anxiety on student attitudes towards English oral communication classes in a Japanese senior high school. Key findings include an initial high level of anxiety among students at the beginning of the course, which gradually decreased as students gained more practice and confidence in speaking English. The author highlights the importance of creating a supportive learning environment and providing opportunities for students to build their speaking skills to help alleviate anxiety and improve student attitudes towards oral communication classes. Additionally, the study emphasizes the effectiveness of consistent practice and encouragement in boosting student confidence and reducing anxiety in English language learning.

Morita (2004) explores the dynamic relationship between participation and identity in second-language academic communities. Key findings include how language learners negotiate their participation within these communities as they construct and negotiate their identities as language users. The study highlights the complex interplay between language proficiency, cultural background, and individual identities in shaping how learners participate in academic contexts. The author emphasizes the importance of considering these factors in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that facilitate language development and identity formation among second language learners.

Zhang and Head (2010) discuss strategies for addressing learner reticence in speaking classes. Key findings include the recognition of reticence as a common issue that can hinder language learning progress, particularly in speaking skills. The study identifies factors contributing to learner reticence such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and cultural differences. The authors suggest various approaches to overcome reticence, including creating a supportive classroom environment, incorporating interactive and engaging activities, providing opportunities for practice and feedback,



and implementing techniques to boost learner confidence. These strategies aim to help learners overcome reticence and develop their speaking skills effectively in the language classroom.

From the above studies, the researchers offer several suggestions for participation improvement. They include using group activities to increase student confidence in speaking tasks; making teacher feedback more encouraging to student participation; acknowledging diverse forms of communication and valuing participation beyond spoken communication.

### **2.3. Cultural influences and student engagement**

Wu's study (2008) explores the phenomenon of class silence in China through the lens of intercultural study. Key findings include the cultural factors that contribute to class silence in Chinese educational settings, such as Confucian values, hierarchical teacher-student relationships, and a preference for listening and contemplation over active participation. The study emphasizes the need to understand and respect these cultural norms when addressing class silence in Chinese classrooms, suggesting that effective communication and teaching strategies should take into account cultural differences to create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Yue and Le (2009) examine the cultural adaptation of Asian students in Australia. Key findings include the challenges faced by Asian students in adapting to the Australian educational system and broader cultural context. The study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing cultural differences, including language barriers, communication styles, and social norms, to support the successful adaptation of Asian students in Australia. The authors suggest that creating a supportive and inclusive environment that acknowledges and respects cultural diversity can enhance the academic and social experiences of Asian students in an Australian setting.

Li (2010) explores the phenomenon of in-class silence among Chinese students, specifically focusing on the "Me Generation." Key findings include the observation of a trend towards silence and lack of participation in the classroom among Chinese students of this generation. The author discusses the factors contributing to this behavior, such as cultural influences, educational background, and personal attitudes. The study highlights the significance of understanding and addressing in-class silence to enhance classroom appropriateness and promote more active student engagement in learning.

Liu (2002) investigates how Chinese students negotiate silence in American classrooms. Key findings include the cultural differences in communication styles and expectations between Chinese students and the American classroom setting. The author presents three case studies of Chinese students navigating silence in American classrooms, highlighting the challenges they face in adapting to a more interactive and participatory learning environment. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding and bridging these cultural differences to create a conducive and inclusive learning space for all students.

From the research mentioned above, it was learned that cultural influences, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence are key factors contributing to learner reticence in speaking classes. The researchers suggest that understanding and addressing in-class silence among Chinese students, influenced by cultural norms and educational background, is essential to promote active student engagement in learning. Besides, bridging cultural differences and creating an inclusive learning environment are crucial for Chinese students' adaptation to interactive and participatory American classrooms.

### **2.4. Research gaps in addressing learner reticence**

The literature above points out two major research gaps that require more empirical work. They include the need for more contextualized and individually tailored approaches to encourage student participation; a more nuanced understanding of silence in diverse local contexts; and more studies into the process of international students' cultural adaptation to meet academic expectations of verbal participation.

### **2.5. Focusing on teaching strategies**

The gap in research on effective strategies to address learner reticence in speaking classes and the need for more tailored approaches to boost learner confidence and participation (Zhang & Head, 2010). Until recently, there remains limited exploration of the specific strategies and techniques that

effectively address student reticence in speaking activities in EFL classrooms (Aripin & Umam, 2019).

Additionally, there is a need for further exploration of the relationship between reticence, anxiety, and oral English proficiency among Chinese learners to develop tailored support strategies (Liu & Jackson, 2011). Currently, there is limited research on the role of self-confidence in reducing reticence among EFL learners and specific techniques to enhance students' self-confidence in speaking ability (Riadil, 2020).

## 2.6 Cultural factors governing communication challenges

The researchers highlight insufficient exploration of the nuanced meanings of silence as a form of participation among Japanese students in academic contexts (Kato, 2010). There is a strong need for further investigation into the cultural adaptations and challenges faced by Chinese learners in navigating silence in American classrooms (Liu, 2002). This is due to inadequate investigation of the cultural factors influencing class silence in Chinese educational settings and the development of culturally responsive teaching strategies to mitigate this silence (Wu, 2008). Overall, there remains limited exploration of the cultural adaptation challenges and support needed for Asian students in Australia to facilitate successful academic and social integration (Yue & Le, 2009). Intercultural discourse has not reached a profound understanding of the complex interplay between participation, identity negotiation, and language proficiency within second-language academic communities (Morita, 2004).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Mixed method case study

This qualitative research study employed a case study methodology to investigate the phenomenon of silence within the context of learning English as a foreign language in a private university in Yogyakarta, focusing specifically on silence during speaking activities within the Speaking course. Following Sugiyono's perspective (2017) on case study as a qualitative approach to examining individual or group instances, the study aimed to interpret specific cases of silence to derive meaningful insights. By focusing on silence in English language learning contexts, the study aimed to shed light on the factors influencing student silence and its implications for language education.

The research participants are students aged 18-24, majoring in English Education, specifically those enrolled in speaking classes. Employing a mix of qualitative research instruments, including classroom observation, field notes, and semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to comprehensively analyze factors contributing to student silence. Classroom observation provided insight into students' behavior and English proficiency, while interviews with quiet students offered a deeper understanding of their feelings and limitations in-class participation. Field notes documented interactions between lecturers and students, enriching the data collected. The researchers developed seven open-ended questions to further explore the underlying causes of student silence, ensuring a thorough investigation into this phenomenon within the EFL classroom context.

The researcher employed a comprehensive approach to understanding student silence in the EFL classroom, combining classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with selected students. During classroom observations, the researcher focused on students exhibiting tendencies towards silence, examining their behavior and involvement in the learning process. Detailed field notes were diligently taken to capture crucial details, including interactions between lecturers and students, and students' responses to lesson materials. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted directly with selected students, identified through prior observations. The interviews delved into various factors contributing to student silence, including linguistic, psychological, and societal aspects, facilitating a deeper understanding of the phenomenon within the EFL classroom context (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher applied a triangulation approach, which involved combining data from both observations and interviews. This approach was chosen to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the data while also providing a more comprehensive grasp of the issue under consideration. The goal of using triangulation was not just to validate the truth of a given social occurrence, but to expand the researchers' understanding of the issue under consideration. This combined data strategy strengthened the findings and added to a more comprehensive understanding of the research issue.

The data analysis process followed a structured approach, guided by Miles and Huberman's qualitative analysis framework, encompassing three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Initially, data reduction involved organizing and streamlining the dataset, employing techniques such as selection, simplification, and abstraction to align with the research objectives. This phase necessitated careful consideration of which elements of the data were pertinent to highlight or minimize, ensuring relevance to the research focus. Subsequently, in the data display stage, the condensed and organized information was presented in a format conducive to interpretation, often utilizing tables or graphical representations to delineate key categories, such as factors contributing to silence in the classroom. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification entailed synthesizing the analyzed data to derive meaningful insights and implications for the research questions. The author critically examined the data's robustness and validity, employing triangulation as a strategy to corroborate findings through the integration of multiple sources and methods of evidence, in line with Miles and Huberman's methodology. Through this systematic approach, the research aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of silence in the EFL classroom, ensuring rigor and reliability in the analysis process.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

### 4.1 Results of Observation

Table 1. Factors Contributing to Silence

Factors Contributing to Silence [SF]	Signs
Being called by the lecturer or waiting for a turn to perform in front of the class	Avoidance: avoiding eye contact, pretending to be busy by reading a book or writing notes, refusing the lecturer's instructions for practice, Physical: losing focus, lowering voice, speaking too fast, shaking, and stuttering.
Ignorant and unconcerned about the surroundings	Avoidance: busy alone with notes, daydreaming, keeping silent when the lecturer orders to discuss with friends, quiet, not talkative.
When the lecturer delivered the material, the student did not pay attention and could not answer the question [SF-UM]	Avoidance: avoiding eye contact, remaining silent when asked questions, Physical: confused, worried

The data contained in [Table 1](#) reveals an interesting phenomenon involving students' tendency to prefer to remain silent in various situations in the classroom. During the implementation of teaching and learning activities, it was observed that most students tended to choose not to actively speak, especially when in speaking classes where active participation was expected. In this situation, the lecturer often needed to take the initiative to call on them one by one, as students tended to be reluctant to speak or perform in front of the class voluntarily. They are only willing to speak when directly asked by the lecturer to take part in verbal interaction. This reflects a general tendency among students to choose to maintain their silence during learning. This choice to remain silent seems to be influenced by several factors, including concerns about making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. The fear of making language mistakes seems to be the main obstacle preventing students from expressing themselves freely. This concern not only affects their confidence but also shapes their decision to remain silent during classroom interactions.

In this context, it is further seen that the role of student personality has a significant impact on the observed patterns of silence. There were variations in responses to classroom interaction from student to student. Some of them seemed to only choose to be silent during the learning process, yet when

given instructions by the lecturer to participate in discussions, they still showed active engagement by interacting with their classmates. This condition indicated the ability and desire to communicate, although they tended to be responsive to the lecturer's direction. In contrast, students who have introverted personality traits tend to take a different approach. They prefer to isolate themselves from social interactions with classmates, choosing not to actively participate in more open social interactions. This choice reflects the introvert's tendency to gain energy and comfort through personal reflection, rather than through intense social interaction. In other words, this habit of silence may be a form of self-protection or coping strategy chosen by introverted students to overcome discomfort in interactive situations involving many people.

Aside from factors such as fear of making mistakes and personality traits, students' tendency to remain silent is also strongly influenced by their lack of understanding of the subject matter being taught. It was noticeable that when the lecturer challenged students with questions to test their understanding after the delivery of the material, the common response was silence, giving the idea that students were facing difficulties in understanding the learning content. This silence can be interpreted as a reflection of the obstacles students face in internalizing and mastering the material that has been presented. Overall, the pattern of students' tendency to remain silent in learning contexts can be interpreted as a response involving many complex and interrelated factors. When looked at in more depth, this phenomenon is not only influenced by fear of speaking mistakes or social discomfort. Instead, there is also a significant role played by factors such as individual personality traits and level of understanding of the learning material.

## 4.2. Discussion

The findings suggest several possible factors that contribute to students' silent behavior in speaking classes. They also indicate that these factors do not only arise from the students themselves but also from the lecturers. Based on the findings, the factors contributing to silence can be classified as follows:

### 1) *Factors Contributing to Silence from Lecturers*

#### a) *Lecturer's Personality*

The personality of a lecturer has a significant impact on students' responses in a classroom. Some participants in this current study revealed that they felt afraid and tended to be silent when interacting with lecturers during the learning process. This feeling of discomfort may arise due to a tense or unsupportive classroom atmosphere, which in turn affects students' comfort to speak and actively participate. The impression of fear and rigidity may stem from the lecturer's overly serious approach, lack of personal interaction, or even a lack of effort to create a friendly and open classroom atmosphere.

Lecturers who have a more friendly, outgoing personality and can create a good relationship with students can help to reduce this sense of fear and rigidity. Conversely, if lecturers appear to be very authoritarian or inaccessible, students may feel reluctant to speak up or ask questions. Therefore, lecturers need to understand the impact of their personalities on the classroom atmosphere and try to create an environment that supports students' courage to speak up.

In this context, the role of the lecturer is not only limited to the delivery of learning materials but also includes the ability to build positive relationships with students. A classroom dominated by tension and fear can hinder the teaching and learning process, while a classroom characterized by a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere can stimulate students' active participation and engagement. By recognizing the impact of a lecturer's personality on students, steps can be taken to create a more inclusive classroom and motivate students to contribute more confidently. A study by Xie and Derakhshan (2021) finds that effective interpersonal communication from lecturers has a positive influence on the learning motivation and academic achievement of students. He adds that the relationship between lecturers and students in the teaching and learning process is a very important factor in creating a pleasant learning atmosphere so that students are motivated to participate actively in class. Student silence within the educational environment can be attributed to causes such as feelings of humiliation, lack of confidence, and fear of the teacher (Adamson, 2022).

#### b) *Lecturer's Evaluation*

Based on the interviews with the participants, lecturers' judgment could contribute to students' silence in the classroom. In the interviews, the students stated that they were afraid of not showing their best abilities in front of lecturers. This fear may arise due to concerns about the lecturer's judgment or criticism, which may affect their perception of themselves and their abilities. In this study,



some students revealed that their inability to communicate well in English was a major factor in their silence in class. They felt a lack of confidence and worry about making mistakes when speaking in English. This was exacerbated by their desire to perform well in front of the lecturer, so they preferred to remain silent and not respond if asked to speak or perform in front of the class using English.

The students reflected feelings of discomfort and concern regarding their English language skills, which in turn might limit their active participation in class discussions. The students' attitude was also related to the fear of failure that was influenced by their thoughts. Several factors underlie the fear of failure in students (Winkel, 1996) such as the atmosphere of teaching and learning in the classroom, the atmosphere in the family, and the student's mind.

Similar findings were found by Sinaga et al. (2020). In their study, they found that one of the factors of student silence was fear of making mistakes that lead to judgment from the lecturer. The students believed that making mistakes could affect their final scores.

## 2) *Silence Factors Coming from Students*

### a) *Low Self-Confidence*

One of the factors that played a significant role in causing the student silence in the class was low self-confidence. Participants consistently expressed a lack of confidence in their English language skills, which was a major barrier for them to actively participate in class. They felt inadequate in using the language, and this concern led to a significantly low self-confidence complex. This distrust was reinforced by their perceptions of classmates who were perceived to have better English language skills. This comparison created feelings of low self-confidence among the participants, who preferred to remain silent so as not to appear less competent than their peers. They felt that they had not mastered much vocabulary and grammar in English, which made them hesitant to speak or actively participate.

In addition, this low self-confidence might also be influenced by their perception of the expected standards in English usage. If they felt that the standards were very high and difficult to achieve, this could create a sense of hopelessness that inhibits their participation. The understanding that they had not fully mastered certain aspects of English, such as vocabulary and grammar, was a major barrier to expressing themselves in an academic environment. The same results were found in the study of Gultom and Oktaviani (2022) study. They found that many students believed that there was a significant difference between their English skills and other classmates, so this made them feel low self-confidence in their abilities.

### b) *Fear of Making Mistakes*

Several beliefs were found to be contributing factors to students' silence in the context of English language learning. In the interviews, the students stated that the fear of making mistakes, especially when faced with the task of speaking in English in front of the class, was one of the reasons that affected their participation. They were worried that pronunciation errors or difficulties in spontaneously assembling English words might hinder their ability to contribute effectively. Furthermore, students also revealed that the nervousness they experienced when speaking English in front of the class could affect their brain performance. They described experiences where anxiousness caused their minds to go blank, making it difficult for them to think clearly and expressively. This condition triggered the occurrence of errors in English. Moreover, the observations showed that students tended to be too afraid to be active in class. They chose to be passive, wait to be called first by the lecturer, and conform to the instructions given. This attitude reflected their inability to overcome fear and anxiety, which in turn hindered active participation in learning.

This is consistent with the findings of Hanh's study (2020). He discovered that one of the causes of student silence was a fear of making mistakes. Fear of making mistakes was one of the factors that caused student silence, the results of his study showed that all participants who tended to be silent in class experienced this kind of concern. In addition, Afifah et al. (2020) found that one of the factors of student silence was fear of making mistakes.

### c) *Grammatical Errors*

The findings highlighted that concern over grammar errors also had a significant impact on students' silence in class. Some students admitted that their uncertainty about grammar was the main cause of their non-participation, especially when faced with situations that asked them to express their opinions or respond using English. They found it difficult to find the right wording, triggered by their lack of proficiency in grammar. Not having full confidence in the use of grammar can create a sense of

discomfort and anxiety, which in turn becomes an obstacle for students to speak actively in class. The awareness of potential mistakes in grammar makes them prefer to remain silent rather than risk making mistakes that could reflect their lack of English proficiency.

This creates a defensive attitude, where students tend to avoid situations where they have to express themselves verbally in English. Feelings of grammar uncertainty can be detrimental to their participation in class discussions, as they feel less prepared to express their thoughts correctly and appropriately. This finding resonates a study conducted by Putri et al. (2020), which indicated that certain students encountered challenges when tasked with speaking English, primarily due to their limited mastery of vocabulary and grammar rules, hindering their ability to communicate fluently and coherently. In addition, Ahmad (2021) found that the most common factor affecting student silence in the classroom was low English proficiency which might range from lack of understanding of grammatical verbs to the inability to produce correct pronunciation.

*d) Unconfident with the Material*

The findings reveal that one of the main factors that cause students to be silent in class is a lack of understanding of the material presented. Most participants emphasized that they often did not pay attention to the lecturer's explanation, which then led to not understanding the learning material. They admitted that this lack of attention was a major obstacle, and as a result, they felt unprepared or unable to provide answers if the lecturer asked something. The participants tended to remain silent when asked by the lecturer as a response to their lack of understanding of the material. They perceived silence as a form of protection or a strategy to avoid situations where their incomprehension could be exposed. Not knowing the answer to the lecturer's question could trigger anxiety and discomfort, so they preferred to save themselves by remaining silent.

This attitude reflects a gap in understanding of the learning material which can affect active participation and interaction in class. Lack of understanding of the material is not only an obstacle to speaking or participating but can also reduce students' confidence in the academic environment. This finding is by the research that has been done by Syuraedah (2019). He found that students chose to remain silent due to their lack of understanding which referred to the absence of ideas to convey. The same finding was also found by Hanh (2020). He found that students' silence habits were caused by their lack of understanding of the questions asked so they preferred to remain silent until the questions given were thrown to other students.

*e) Student's lack of Vocabulary*

Based on the participants' confessions, limited vocabulary was one of the main factors that hindered their engagement in the classroom. Especially when they were required to stay active in speaking classes, many of them found it difficult to find the right vocabulary to convey their ideas clearly and effectively. This finding is supported by the results of observation which found that some students still had limitations in vocabulary. When they were in front of the class to express their opinions related to a certain theme, it was seen that they tended to stammer and looked confused in conveying their thoughts. This limitation affected the fluency and flexibility of their verbal expressions. It seems that vocabulary limitations not only create obstacles in expressing themselves but also affect students' self-confidence. They felt unsure and underprepared to speak in public because they were hampered by the lack of words they could use.

A similar finding was found by Haryadi and Aprianoto (2020) that low English proficiency such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and inability to speak fluently and respond quickly influenced the participation of students in the classroom. Generally, the more proficient students tended to be more confident and less anxious in speaking and responding to their teachers. This is consistent with the findings of Chand's study (2021). He discovered that one of the causes of the silence was a lack of vocabulary. A similar finding was also reported by Sedova and Navratilova (2020). In their study, they found that lack of vocabulary was one of the most influential factors that contributed to student silence.

*f) Student's personality*

Students' personality factors are one of the main contributors to silence in the classroom, where the difference between introverted and extroverted students stands out. Observations made by the researcher showed that students with introverted tendencies stood out more than their peers, as they tended to withdraw from social interactions in the surrounding environment. During discussion

sessions with classmates, students with this personality tended to isolate themselves, chose to remain silent, and preferred to write in their notes. Through interviews, the researcher found that the students with introverted tendencies came to class with the main focus of study. However, they were not very interested in interacting with other classmates. These students also admitted that they were not very good at initiating conversations, so if no one was talking to them, they tended to remain silent.

This attitude reflects different individual preferences and needs in social interaction in an academic environment. Students with introverted personalities tend to find comfort in isolation and prefer to focus on academics rather than active social interaction. The challenge of initiating conversations is also an inhibiting factor that causes their silence in the classroom. The same finding was found by Noviana and Oktaviani (2022). They found that the different personalities of each student were one of the factors causing student silence in class. Students with introverted personalities were reluctant to respond to teachers and were not good at expressing their opinions. Nopiana et al. (2022) also found that students with introverted personalities tended to withdraw from the surrounding environment and needed silence or a separate space to think and gather energy.

## 5. Conclusion

This study revealed that student silence in speaking classes is caused by eight factors. These factors can be divided into two categories, namely factors that come from lecturers and factors that come from students. The factors that come from the lecturer include the lecturer's assertive personality and the lecturer's judgment. An assertive lecturer personality can create an intimidating atmosphere for students, while unsupportive or overly critical lecturer assessments can increase students' fear of actively participating. Meanwhile, factors originating from students include fear of making mistakes, which includes the fear of making mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage. Lack of vocabulary mastery can hinder students' ability to convey ideas effectively. Not understanding the material can also be a cause of student silence. Lack of confidence in their abilities reflects the importance of building students' confidence in the context of language learning. Students' introverted personalities, which suggests that personality preferences, can also affect students' level of engagement in the classroom.

This study has made notable contributions to the research discourse in several aspects. Firstly, it addresses the requirement for contextualized and individually tailored strategies to enhance student participation, particularly focusing on Indonesia. Secondly, the project has advanced a nuanced understanding of silence within Indonesian contexts. However, while these contributions are valuable, they are not sufficient to propel the field forward. Further research is warranted to delve deeper into the cultural adaptation processes of international students in meeting academic expectations regarding verbal participation.

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- Author contribution** : BWP initiated the idea, developed the instruments, analyzed the data and refined the manuscript. GPV was responsible for data collection and writing the draft. DB proofread, add content and finalized the final draft.
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- Declaration of ethics:** We as authors acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conform with the regulations of our university and that we have obtained the permission from the relevant institute and participants when collecting data.

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