

INVESTIGATING KURDISH LEARNERS' SILENCE IN EFL CLASSROOMS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

NIROUZH SULAIMAN ABDULTHAMAN and MOHAMMED BASIL ALAZZAWI

Dept. of English, College of Languages, University of Duhok, Kurdistan Region-Iraq

Dept. of English, College of Arts, University of Mosul-Iraq

(Received: December 18, 2022; Accepted for Publication: June 5, 2023)

ABSTRACT

Numerous educators have encountered silence in their language classrooms. Considerable research has examined the causes of silence and its prevalence in the area of foreign language teaching. However, no study has been conducted on the factors behind the silence of Kurdish Learners of English as a foreign language. This study investigates the phenomenon of students keeping silent during EFL classes. The data for this study were obtained through the use of a closed-ended questionnaire with a total of 60 (30 males and 30 females) English major college students at the English Language Department/College of Languages/University of Duhok. According to the findings, there are a number of factors that contribute to students remaining silent., namely linguistic and psychological, performance and classroom-based reasons. The findings also show a considerable difference between male and female students in terms of the reasons that make them silent inside EFL classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Silence, Kurdish Learners, speaking foreign language anxiety, communication obstacles.

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learners' silence inside the classroom has been identified as one of the obstacles of learning the target language which is facilitated by learners' communication inside the classroom. It takes a long time to learn a language and become fluent, accurate, and versatile in its use. For that protracted procedure, a lot of practice is required inside and outside the class. The issue of EFL learners' silence becomes a concern for teachers as well as learners since language production and the ability to have verbal interaction in the target language hold crucial importance towards learning the target language. In other words, learners need to participate actively and use language inside the classroom in order to master the target language.

1.1 Aims of the Research.

The silent behaviour demonstrated by learners during foreign language learning class is a matter that holds crucial significance. Silence in classrooms can become a barrier for students towards learning the language This study aims to find out the reason due to which Kurdish learners of English remain silent during their foreign language learning class. It aims to find out the reason due to which some students do not participate actively in their foreign language

classes.

1.2 Research Questions.

The research is intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reasons due to which Kurdish learners prefer to remain silent inside EFL classrooms?
2. Does learners' gender have an effect on their silence behaviour inside the classroom?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Definition of Silence

There are a lot of language teachers who have had to deal with awkward silences in their classrooms and struggled to get their students to be more engaged. As a result, they have worked hard to specify the reasons behind their students silence Saville-Troike (1988) relates silence to "timidity, embarrassment, fear, and neurosis." King et al. (2020: 61) state that silence is "an inherently complex and ambiguous phenomenon which can be devilishly difficult to interpret and which defies easy generalizations." Jaworski argues that "silence is a diverse concept, and its study merits an interdisciplinary approach" (1997: 1). In addition, Bonvillain (1993: 47) defines silence as "an act of non-verbal communication that transmits many kinds of meaning, depending on cultural norms of

interpretation." Furthermore, Wilson (2005: 43) defines silence to mean "to communicate certain feelings, like anger, distancing, rejection, etc., in order to achieve a set of personal objectives." As for the student's silence, Giles et al. (1992), Jaworski & Sachdev (1998), Harumi (2001), and Juniati et al. (2018) state that silence in a classroom context can be interpreted as rudeness, laziness, lack of interest, passivity, an unwillingness to communicate, a sign of hostility, rejection, or interpersonal incompatibility, anxiety or shyness, or a lack of verbal skills. Similarly, according to Zembylas and Vrasidas (2007), silence is "associated with either non-participation or marginalization."

2.2 Reasons behind Silence inside the Classroom

Tsui (1996) identifies a number of variables that contributed to student silence. These factors include students' incapacity to comprehend the teacher's speech, students' fear of making errors and losing "face," and students' lack of sufficient time to assimilate material (cited in Delima, 2012). Other aspects that could explain why students tend to be quiet in language classes include how well they know the target language, how well they have spoken in the classroom in the past, how confident they are, and what classes lessons are about. In addition, depending on the circumstances, some students choose to keep silent because they struggle with social anxiety or are afraid of being judged by their peers (Briggs 1988; Coplan et al. 2011; Richmond, Wrench, and McCroskey 2013).

Some students may not speak up because they do not understand the content, they hate the class or the manner of discussing the material, uncertainty of what their teachers anticipate from them (Reda 2009). Studies that were piloted on Asian learners who were enrolled in EFL classes also claimed that their inherent shyness is main reason behind their silence (Townsend, 1998). Tani (2005) states that silence may be due to the absence of motivation, that can contribute to students' unwillingness to actively participate in EFL classroom discussions and activities. If the students are interested in learning throughout their time in EFL lessons, they will make an effort to participate in classroom activities, even though they do not have a particularly strong mastery of the English language.

Likewise, Hanh (2020) indicates various causes of students' silence, personal and impersonal, linguistic and psychological factors

such as students' personalities and language proficiency, teachers' methodology, lesson contents, and class cooperation. Another factor that might act as the reason behind students unwillingness to participate in EFL classroom activities is high levels of anxiety. According to Jackson (2002), anxiety is a feeling of tension, nervousness, and concern related to an arousal of the automatic nervous system. EFL students are likely to feel more anxious because they try to use a foreign language but do not use it competently. Reluctance to participate in class activities is one way to avoid class participation. Some students habitually sit in the back rows because they do not want to actively participate in class, preferring to work in small groups because they feel more comfortable. These students, behaviours support the research by Liu and Littlewood (1997), who stated that large classes tended to discourage students from sharing their ideas and heightened their anxiety to communicate in a foreign language for fear of public embarrassment if they made a mistake in front of their peers.

1.1 Studies on Silence in the Language Classrooms

Unfortunately, there is not even one study that examines the silence of Kurdish students in the field of learning English as a foreign language. In this section, the researcher will shed light on some other studies that have been conducted on EFL speakers of languages other than Kurdish. Harumi (2002) conducted research on silence in cross-cultural communication among Japanese students of English as a foreign language. According to the results of the research, there are students who are able to express themselves when they are addressed personally, owing to the fact that various cultures have varying levels of this expectation. Tok (2009) conducted research on Turkish learners' communication problems in English-language classrooms. He found out that the main obstacles to communicating among Turkish EFL learners are anxiety and an unwillingness to communicate, the level of these reasons varies depending on the learner's gender and the field of study. An additional study was conducted by Liu and Mou (2008), in which the causes and cultural meanings of silence were investigated through the use of an ethnographic study of silence behaviours among postgraduate Chinese students in EFL classrooms. The findings of this study revealed that Chinese students' silence behaviours are influenced by Chinese cultural

notions of face, power, and shame in social relationships. Halawachy (2014) investigated the reasons behind the silence of 43 Iraqi learners at university level. She used gender as the main variable in her research and found out that there were differences between male and female students' silence. Furthermore, she also discovered that the reasons behind silence are pedagogical and psychological reasons, such as shyness, anxiety, fear of pronouncing a word differently, and the nature of the material being taught by the teacher. Nakane (2007) discussed classroom case studies of three Japanese students who were enrolled in mainstream university courses in Australia. The studies included analysis of recorded classroom interaction as well as follow-up interviews with the Japanese participants, Australian lecturers, and fellow students in the classes. In the follow-up interviews, it was discovered that all of the Japanese students were judged to be "silent" by both their instructors and their classmates; however, the examination of classroom interaction indicated that the amount and nature of silence differed from student to student. In another study, Choi (2015) investigated the perceptions of as well as the causes behind, the low levels of conversational involvement and silence shown by Korean students enrolled in graduate programmes in the United States. The participants were interviewed in a semi-structured format by the researcher, and the data were analysed using a constant comparison approach. According to the results of the survey, the participants rated themselves as the individuals in their classrooms who spoke the least. The students' lack of mastery of the English terminology related to their discipline, the effect of Korean classroom habits, and a desire to save face were some of the reasons behind their silence. On the other hand, it was clear that the participants had a great desire to participate since they were really engaged in the work that they were doing on the online discussion board.

It is important to shed light on a study carried out by King (2013a, b) in which over 900 Japanese English learners studying in a higher education setting underwent almost 48 hours of structured classroom observation. King (2013a, b) discovered that students were responsible for less than 1% of initiated talk and that over a fifth of observed class time was marked by silence in which neither staff nor students spoke. Silence took several shapes and purposes in Japanese

university classes, according to King, and its causes were numerous and linked, with inhibition and socio-psychological variables proving particularly important.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section provides a summary of the methodology that is used in this study. It provides an explanation of the method, including the design of the study, the selection of participants and their descriptions, the tools that were used for data collection, and the analysis of the data.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the current study were 60 Kurdish students (30 males and 30 females) learning English as a foreign language (EFL). All the participants are from the department of English, college of languages, University of Duhok. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 25. Gender balance has been taken into account by the researcher.

3.3 Instrument

3.3.1 Questionnaire

It is commonly acknowledged that a questionnaire is the most well-known research instrument that is designed to gather data in the form of written responses. According to Walliman (2011: 97), a questionnaire is an effective instrument for collecting data since it enables the researcher to "get responses without actually having to speak to every responder and avoid influencing the participants' answers." A researcher may get a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time by employing a questionnaire. To find out the reasons why Kurdish students of English remain silent in EFL classes, the present study adopted a quantitative data collection design. The quantitative data were obtained using a questionnaire.

The researcher developed a questionnaire specifically for Kurdish EFL students who were having trouble expressing their thoughts when they were participating in classroom activities. This questionnaire's items were adapted from questionnaires used by Halawachy (2014), Jaworski and Sachdev (1998) and Altunash (2014). These items have been adjusted to align with the aims of this research. 60 Kurdish EFL learners participated in giving responses to the questionnaire which comprised 18 close-ended items. A Likert scale of five points was used to rate the 18 items of the questionnaire and as

follows: 1. strongly disagree; 2. disagree; 3. not sure; 4. agree; and 5. strongly agree. Since all the respondents were students at the University of Duhok, English Department, College of Languages, the questionnaire was written in English. A preliminary version of the questionnaire was tested by a group of jury members in the department of English to ensure its validity and reliability.

3.4 Procedure

A written questionnaire was used to collect data for this research. The data were obtained in October (2022). 60 students were given the questionnaire during class time. It took the participants around 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Before handing out the questionnaire, the researcher explained the study and its aims and provided guidance on how to respond to the items truthfully. Following this, the researcher had only the Kurdish-speaking students remain in class to fill in the questionnaire.

4 Data Analysis and Findings

The data obtained via the questionnaire were analysed and quantified using the SPSS programme (Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences). The researcher adopted a descriptive statistical method that involved frequencies, percentages and mean score to get an idea of the broad trend of responses from participants. The 18 items of the questionnaire were classified into two main categories, learner-based and classroom-based reasons. The learner-based category was further sub-classified into several subcategories, such as psychological reasons, linguistic reasons and performance reasons.

1. Learner-based Reasons behind Students' Silence in Language Classes:

Students keep silent inside the classroom due to a variety of reasons. The reasons that belong to the students themselves are the most common ones. To make the analysis clearer and more understandable, the researcher classified the learner-based reasons into several sets as follows:

a. Psychological Reasons:

Lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, feeling shy and anxiety are the most influential psychological reasons behind students' silence inside language classrooms.

Table (1): Psychological -Based Reasons for Students' Silence

#	Psychological - based reasons	Gender	SD		D		NS		A		SA		Mean
			No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	
1.	I lack enough self-confidence.	Male	14	47%	3	10%	5	17%	6	20%	2	7%	2.40
		Female	2	7%	8	27%	5	17%	8	27%	7	23%	3.63
2.	I am shy	Male	12	40%	5	17%	3	10%	4	13%	6	20%	2.43
		Female	1	3%	12	40%	2	7%	5	17%	10	33%	3.55
3.	I feel anxious when I talk.	Male	6	20%	7	23%	5	17%	5	17%	7	23%	3.60
		Female	6	20%	8	27%	2	7%	12	40%	2	7%	3.60
4.	I lack motivation	Male	7	23%	12	40%	7	23%	4	13%	0	0%	2.67
		Female	12	40%	5	17%	3	10%	4	13%	6	20%	2.43

SD: Strongly disagree D: Disagree NS: Not sure A: Agree SA: Strongly agree

According to the data presented in the table above, lack of confidence is one of the many psychological factors that contribute to learners' silence inside the classroom. It is evident that Kurdish male students have more self-confidence than female students, given that 57% of male students strongly disagree/disagree with

the statement "I lack self-confidence," whereas 50% of female students either agree or strongly agree with the same statement. They believe that one of the reasons behind their silence in the EFL classroom is their lack of confidence.. The remaining 50% of female respondents either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, or they are uncertain about it. The responses of the female participants are consistent with the

findings of Hanh (2020), who found out that 68% of the Vietnamese students he taught believed that lack of confidence was an obstacle to their engagement in the classroom. When it comes to the item of motivation, the findings indicate that 50% of the male students strongly disagree/disagree with the item (I am not motivated). Likewise, 63% of female students expressed significant disagreement with the same item. In other words, Kurdish learners do not believe that lack of motivation is the cause behind their silence. This further indicates that students are motivated when they are present in the classroom. This is a positive indicator that the participants have the desire to participate inside EFL classes.

As for the effect of shyness on speaking, item 3 reveals that being shy is not an obstacle to speaking for the majority of the male students (strongly disagree-disagree: 57%), and the other half of the males are not sure about the item. Only a few male students feel shy inside the classroom (13%). While half of the female students (50%) feel shy, the other half either strongly disagree/disagree, or are not sure about the item. These results agree with those arrived at by Halawachy (2014), in which Iraqi female students consider shyness an obstacle to their participation inside the classroom. In contrast, results by Al-Jarjary (2020) confirms that shyness is not considered a reason for his participants' silence.

Anxiety is another important reason that prevent students to speak inside the classroom. According to the preceding table, 40% of male students and 47% of female students choose strongly agree/ agree for item 4. In other words, nearly half of both male and female participants do have anxiety inside the classroom while the other half do not experience any anxiety or are not sure about it. These results contradict King's

(2013) study within Japanese university foreign language classrooms who emphasizes that anxiety is a dominant variable amongst a host of other factors in that setting. The results go in line with those of Williams and Andrade (2008) who found out that almost as high as fifty per cent of students in Japanese universities expected to experience anxiety whilst studying a foreign language. It is apparent from Table 1 that the highest mean recorded among psychological learner-based reasons is 3.63 for item 1 (I lack self-confidence). In other words, most of the Kurdish female students who participated in this research agree that a lack of self-confidence is the most influential psychological factor behind their silence inside the classroom. The highest mean among male students is 3.60, which means most male students agree that anxiety is the reason behind their silence in the classroom context. Similarly, the same mean is recorded for females (3.60), who definitely agree that anxiety is the second psychological reason that makes them silent in the classroom. Another considerable difference between males and females is shyness, which is recorded at 3.55 with females and 2.43 with males. That is to say, males disagree that shyness is the reason behind their silence, while females do agree on the same item. The lowest mean recorded with both male (2.30) and female (2.67) students is for the item (I am not motivated). Students disagree that the lack of motivation is reason behind their silence inside the classroom.

b. Linguistic Reasons

It seems that the lack of linguistic competence is another significant obstacle that prevents the students to participate inside the classroom. The following table illustrates the most common reasons that are related to the linguistic competence.

Table (2): Linguistic-Based Reasons for Students' Silence

#	-Linguistic-based reasons	Gender	SD		D		NS		A		SA		Mean
			No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	
1.	I do not have sufficient vocabulary	Male	4	13%	11	37%	3	10%	9	30%	3	10%	3.13
		Female	3	10%	8	27%	4	13%	11	37%	4	13%	2.83
2.	I cannot express myself sufficiently in English.	Male	8	27%	8	27%	2	7%	11	37%	1	3%	3.36
		Female	3	10%	9	30%	3	10%	11	37%	4	13%	2.86
3.	My level of English	Male	11	37%	7	23%	4	13%	6	20%	2	7%	3.63

	is low.	Female	6	20%	15	50%	5	7%	3	10%	1	3%	3.73
4.	I want to make my listening better.	Male	4	13%	6	20%	3	10%	7	23%	10	33%	3.43
		Female	4	13%	2	7%	6	20%	11	37%	7	23%	3.50

SD: Strongly disagree D: Disagree NS: Not sure A: Agree SA: Strongly agree

The frequencies for item 5 indicate that, due to a lack of vocabulary, half of the participants remain silent inside the classroom. The data shows that female students strongly agree/ agree (50%) with this item, while 37% strongly disagree / disagree with it. In contrast, half of the male students strongly disagree/disagree that 'the lack of vocabulary' is behind their silence inside the classrooms. According to the findings, there is no apparent difference between males and females. The reason behind such a result may go back to teachers who do not place enough emphasis on "vocabulary teaching," and the lack of review or practise with newly acquired vocabulary may also be a contributing factor. This result is in line with Koizumi (2005), who finds a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and verbal competence. The data from this study also reveals that 40% of the male participants strongly agree/ agree with the sixth item 'I cannot express myself sufficiently in English', whereas 50% of the female students strongly agree / agree with this item. The reasons behind students' inability to express themselves in English may go back to the lack of opportunities to practise English outside the classroom, and even inside the classroom, the teacher must create an environment that makes students feel comfortable when they speak. This finding is in agreement with Jordan (2009), who shows that "the most persistent problem for the students is the inability to express themselves adequately in English. He finds out that the students spend

little time actually speaking English in a typical day.

Similarly, Ortega (2007) also shows that his students find it challenging to have oral discussions in English. It is worth noting that both male and female students strongly disagree/disagree with Item 7 (my level of English is low) with percentages of 60% and 70%, respectively. In other words, Kurdish male and female learners do not consider the low level of English as an obstacle in the classroom setting. Finally, the questionnaire results show that 53% of male students and 60% of female students strongly agreed /agreed with item 8. This result agrees with results by Halawachy (2014) who showed that 77% of male students and 83% of female students keep silent inside the classroom to improve their listening. Halawachy (2014) considered this factor "the most preferable and safest way to not participate in the class for those who are reluctant to volunteer.

The data in the table above demonstrates that the highest mean score attained for both female and male is (3. 73) and (3.63) respectively for item 3. In other words, if one looks at mean scores of all the items, one can realize that both male and female students do agree in varying scores for all items that linguistic reasons are the main reasons behind their silence inside the classroom.

C. Performance factors:

Fear of making mistakes such as grammatical mistakes, pronunciation mistakes, giving wrong answers and fear of being mocked at are also factors which hinder students' speaking inside the classroom as illustrated in the following table

Table (3): Performance- Based Reasons for Students' Silence

No.	Performance - based Reasons	Gender	SD		D		NS		A		SA		Mean
			No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	
1.	I am afraid of giving wrong answers	Male	3	10%	5	17%	3	10%	9	30%	10	33%	2.4
		Female	2	7%	4	13%	4	13%	14	47%	6	20%	2.4
2.	I answer in my mind. I prevent say it out loud.	Male	7	23%	5	17%	4	13%	10	33%	4	13%	2.96
		Female	3	10%	4	13%	10	33%	11	37%	2	7%	3.16
3.	I fear pronunciation mistakes	Male	3	10%	4	13%	10	33%	9	30%	4	13%	2.76
		Female	1	3%	5	17%	7	23%	12	40%	5	17%	2.5
4.	I fear being mocked at by classmates.	Male	12	40%	8	27%	5	17%	2	7%	3	10%	3.80
		Female	9	30%	7	23%	8	27%	4	13%	2	7%	3.56
5.	I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes.	Male	10	33%	5	17%	4	13%	6	20%	5	17%	3.3
		Female	2	7%	8	27%	5	17%	8	27%	7	23%	2.66

SD: Strongly disagree D: Disagree NS: Not sure A: Agree SA: Strongly agree

The above table shows that item 4 has been disapproved by the participants. Kurdish male and female learners do not have the fear of being mocked by classmates, according to percentages (67% and 53%, respectively). This result is in line with those by Halawachy (2014). Worth noting, 50% of female participants strongly agree/ agree with item 5 'I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes'. This result is in line with Hanh's (2020), in which 58% of his Vietnamese participants confirm that the fear of making grammatical mistakes is the main reason for their silence.

On the other hand, 50% of male participants strongly disagree/disagree with the same item. This indicates that Kurdish male students do not consider item 5 a reason for their silence inside the classroom. The responses of male students are in line with those of Al-Jarjary (2021), who showed that 48% of his participants disagree with the same item. On the other hand, Halawachy (2014) indicated that 65% of her female participants and 64% of her male participants consider the fear of making grammatical mistakes as one of the most important factors behind their silence. Item 3, "fear of pronunciation mistakes," seems to record high percentages with both males and females (43% and 57%, respectively). So both

genders consider this factor to be a barrier behind their reticence inside EFL classrooms. The results of this item go in line with those of Al-Jarjary (2021), who indicated that the fear of making pronunciation mistakes was approved as a reason for his participants' silence. Halawachy (2014) also stated that 64% of her participants are silent inside the classroom because of a fear of making pronunciation mistakes.

Moreover, the fear of giving wrong answers is another serious barrier for Kurdish learners that prevent them from taking part in the lectures. Kurdish male and female students (63% and 67% respectively) strongly agree / agree. These findings are consistent with those reported by Al-Jarjary (2021) and Halawachy (2014), who received 60% and 71% approval from their participants, respectively. This item is very much related to the previous two items, which deal with the fear of making grammatical and pronunciation mistakes. So, students' lack of proficiency in English, and grammar in particular, is a major barrier to participation. This matches with what Nakane (2007) diagnoses in Japanese students in Australian universities with respect to language proficiency, resulting in their silence. According to her, "weak language skills of Japanese students were frequently mentioned as a problem."

Item 2 elicit that almost half of male (46%) and female students (44%) strongly agree/ agree

with this item (I answer in my mind. I prevent saying it aloud). The rest of the participants are either not sure or disagree with this item. The last item in the table which is (I want to make my listening better), 60% of female students agree /strongly agree with this item whereas male students who agree / strongly agree with it are 46%. Al-Halawachy (2008: p.87). considers listening as "... a safe strategy adopted by learners to avoid making mistakes for fear of talking or for any other reason. . It is obvious from the above table that the majority of the male and female learners believe that the fear of being mocked inside the classroom is the reason

behind their silence, with a mean score of 3.80 and 3.56 respectively.

On the other hand, both male and female students disagree with item 1 with mean scores of (2.4). Learners should understand that language errors are a normal and indispensable part of the language learning process. Improvement can only be achieved through participation in classroom activities and discussions, and errors lead to improvement

D. Classroom- Based Reasons

The following table shows some reasons behind students' silence depending on classroom atmosphere.

Table (4) Classroom -based Reasons for Students' Silence

#	Classroom -based reasons	Gender	SD		D		NS		A		SA		Mean
			No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	No.	Per.	
1.	No enough time is given to digest the information and answer.	Male	1	3%	6	20%	9	30%	10	33%	4	13%	2.66
		Female	0	0%	9	30%	8	27%	8	27%	4	13%	2.66
2.	I have difficulty in timing. Others speak before I do.	Male	1	3%	10	33%	6	20%	9	30%	4	13%	2.7
		Female	3	10%	8	27%	5	17%	13	43%	1	3%	3.13
3.	I do not speak because of a stressful classroom atmosphere.	Male	3	10%	8	27%	9	30%	8	27%	2	7%	3.06
		Female	2	7%	5	17%	8	27%	9	30%	6	20%	2.6
4.	Lack of equal allocation of opportunities to speak	Male	12	40%	7	23%	5	17%	3	10%	3	10%	3.73
		Female	7	23%	4	13%	6	20%	7	23%	6	20%	2.96
5.	I have difficulty in getting called on in class.	Male	6	20%	9	30%	1	3%	8	27%	6	20%	3.03
		Female	4	13%	8	27%	1	3%	12	40%	5	17%	2.8

SD: Strongly disagree D: Disagree NS: Not sure A: Agree SA: Strongly agree

Table 4 shows that male and female students strongly agree/ agree with Item 1 (43% and 40%, respectively). That is, the majority of participants strongly agree/ agree, that there is insufficient time for them to digest information and respond. Jackson (2002) found that some students "needed more time to think about a question since they were formulating a response

in their native language that they would then need to translate." Tsui (1996) also added that being pushed to answer questions literally within seconds by teachers "frightens the students, stops them from thinking, and suppresses their wish to answer the questions."

The responses given to item 2 reveal that almost half of the students have difficulty with timing, since both male and female students strongly agree / disagree 43% with it. Similarly,

53% of female students strongly agree /agree with item 4, while 63% of male students strongly disagree /disagree with this item. This result contradicts Altuntaş (2014), who stated that more than half of his Turkish learners do not have any problem with timing or the allocation of opportunities to speak. In Jackson's (2002) study, some students blame their instructors for this situation. They complain that their instructor frequently chose the same students for questions or did not give them enough time to think when they were singled out for a question, causing them to be too quick to respond. Concerning the stressful environment in the classroom in item 3, there is a discrepancy between the responses of 34% of males who strongly agree/ agree with it, and the remaining are mostly unsure. On the other hand, female students strongly agree/ agree with this item to the tune of 50%. This result goes in line with Altuntash (2014).

Finally, both male (47%) and female (57) students strongly agree/agree with item 5 which means that having difficulty in getting called on inside the classroom is one of the main reasons behind their silence.

As far as classroom-based reasons are concerned, table (4) shows that the highest mean score recorded for male students is (3.73) for item 4 which means that the majority of the male participants agree that there is a lack of equal allocations of opportunities to speak inside the classroom. Meanwhile, females consider the timing difficulty with mean (3.13) as a main reason behind their reticence. Other reasons are proved to be agreed with by males and females with different mean scores.

5.CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Silence is a normal phenomenon in EFL classrooms, and it forms a challenge to both the teaching and learning processes. There are a number of potential reasons that cause students' silence in the classroom. Some of these reasons are learner-based such as psychological reasons, linguistic reasons and performance reasons whereas other reasons are classroom-based reasons which are related to the classroom atmosphere in general.

As far as the psychological reasons are concerned, the researcher has concentrated on four main categories of psychological reasons that cause silence which are lack of self-

confidence, shyness, anxiety and lack of motivation. Results show that male learners suffer from anxiety inside an EFL classroom where as female learners consider lack of self-confidence, anxiety and shyness as main psychological reasons that make them silent.

In terms of linguistic reasons, there is a considerable difference between males and females. The former consider the lack of vocabulary as an important factor that causes silence while the majority of female learners say that their low level in English and inability to express themselves adequately cause their reticent in their classes. In the meantime, it is considered that the student's behaviour of remaining silent can also be attributed to a number of performance reasons such as the fear of making mistakes and being mocked at. Male learners are mostly afraid of making grammatical mistakes and also being foolish in front of their teachers and classmates. In contrast, females are afraid of doing pronunciation mistakes when they are engaged in oral activities. Other reasons are classroom-based reasons including lack of time for the processing of information, turn-taking, having difficulty of being called on and the stressful classroom atmosphere. Male learners consider lack of equal allocations of opportunities to speak as main reason behind their silence while females state that the stressful classroom atmosphere prevent them from participation inside the classroom.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this investigation provide convincing evidence that there appears to be a distinct and prevalent attitude toward silence within the English as a Foreign Language classrooms among Kurdish students majoring in English in the department of English/school of languages/ university of Duhok. In light of the ideas that have been presented throughout the course of the article, the following recommendations on educational practise have come to mind:

First, it is essential to enhance students' language abilities because it has been demonstrated to have an effect that facilitates the interactions that take place in the classroom. When students experience success in the target language, their confidence levels rise, which in turn leads to an increase in the quantity of oral activity they engage in. Therefore, teachers should develop a variety of activities for classroom engagement in order to stimulate the

attention of their students, as well as offer as many opportunities as they can for their students to use the target language in their own speech. Motivating and inspiring students to present themselves verbally in front of their classmates should be a regular component of the educational experience. Teachers should place an emphasis in the classroom on linguistic skills such as grammatical structures, vocabulary, word collocations, and phonetics. This will ensure that students are able to correctly express themselves in English. Students might benefit from developing the habit of listening to English-speaking channels as part of their daily routines in order to improve their language skills.

Second, a student's inability to acquire English skills due to a lack of self-confidence is one of the primary reasons why it is essential for teachers to build students' confidence. To achieve this goal, it is necessary for teachers to support students in developing a more comprehensive understanding and an appropriate value of themselves, as well as to develop in students the belief that they can become proficient in English if they put in sufficient effort. The students need to be reassured by their teachers that making mistakes is not something to be afraid of but rather something to be learned from. In addition, it is essential for EFL teachers to demonstrate patience and concern for their students in order to alleviate the anxiety and stress that students experience while participating in EFL classes. Students will only readily participate in activities and assignments that are specifically designed for them after they have developed the confidence necessary to communicate in the classroom.

Third, the learning atmosphere should be one that is comfortable and conducive to harmony. This is a necessary element for the interaction that takes place in the classroom, which plays a significant part in achieving good teaching. Giving students greater time and flexibility in how they participate in class is one of the most effective ways for teachers to establish a peaceful and calm environment in the classroom. The teacher's role shifts from that of a dominant and controlling figure to that of an organizer, instructor, facilitator, helper, and evaluator who is responsible for creating an environment in which students can actively participate. The students in such a harmonious classroom should feel less worried and anxious about engaging in the activities that are being conducted in the

classroom. Students' ability to contribute to classroom interactions can only be improved, and classroom silence can only be broken, through the promotion of empathy among students and between students and their teachers.

Lastly, the teaching methods have a significant impact on the academic performance of the students in the classroom, and as a result, teachers should encourage students to ask questions, organise them to work together to find answers, and always be ready to assist them. This is beneficial for the development of students' abilities to interact with one another. Without providing students with constructive criticism, teachers should work to encourage students to take on personal challenges by asking them to answer questions during class. When it comes to influencing the habits of students, positive comments can be a great deal more effective than negative ones. In addition, there should be an increase in the number of activities that students participate in. Some examples of these activities are debates, role-playing, and group discussions. Teachers can encourage students to participate in class activities with enthusiasm by employing a variety of successful teaching approaches, which allows them to break the silence that typically exists in the classroom.

To sum up, the following are some suggestions that have been made in order to avoid students' silence in EFL classrooms at the university level: boosting students' confidence in expressing themselves, increasing students' language skills, employing communicative teaching methods, and building up a friendly classroom atmosphere. Along with these suggestions, teachers will need to adjust their pedagogical approaches and update their teaching methods in order to arouse students' interest in learning and, as a result, encourage their participation in that learning.

REFERENCES

- Al-Halawachy, H. F. (2014). "EFL Learner's Silence at University Level: Where to?" *Journal of Education and Practice*. Vol.5, No.12, 90-97.
- Al-Jarjary, M.H.A. (2020). "Investigating the Reasons behind EFL University Student's Silence in Translation Classes: A Field Study". *ADAB AL-RAFIDAYN*, Supplement VOL. (86) October.
- Altunash, E. (2014). *Silence in the EFL Classroom*. International Conference on Education and Social Sciences Proceedings.

- Bonvillain, N. (1993). *Language, Culture and Communication*. Englewood: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Briggs, S. R. (1988). "Shyness: Introversion or Neuroticism?" *Journal of Research in Personality* 22 (3): 290–307. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0092-6566\(88\)90031-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0092-6566(88)90031-1).
- Choi, J. Y. (2015). "Reasons for Silence: A Case Study of Two Korean Students at a U.S. Graduate School". *TESOL Journal*, 6, 579-596.
- Coplan, R. J., Hughes, K., Bosacki, S., and Rose-Krasnor, L. (2011). "Is Silence Golden? Elementary School Teachers' Strategies and Beliefs regarding Hypothetical Shy/Quiet and Exuberant/ Talkative Children." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 103 (4):939–51. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024551>.
- Delima, E. M. (2012). "A reticent student in the classroom: A consequence of the art of questioning". *Asian EFL Journal*, (60), 51-69.
- Giles, H., Coupland, N. and Wienmann, J.M. (1992). "Talk is cheap' but 'My word is my bond': Beliefs about talk". In K. Bolton and H. Kwok (eds) *Sociolinguistics Today: Eastern and Western Perspectives* (pp. 218-243). London: Routledge.
- Hanh, N. T. (2020) "Silence is Gold?: A Study on Students' Silence in EFL Classrooms". *International Journal of Higher Education* Vol. 9, No. 4.
- Harumi, S. (2011). "Classroom silence: Voices from Japanese EFL learners". *ELT Journal*, 65(3), 260-269. doi:10.1093/elt/ccq04.
- Harumi, S. (2002). "The Use of Silence by Japanese EFL learners", *PAC3 at JALT 2001, International Conference Center, Kitakyushu Japan*, Ed. Malcolm Swanson and David McMurray. Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching.
- Jackson, J. (2002). "Reticence in second language case discussions: Anxiety and aspirations". *System*, 30, 65–84. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(01)00051-3
- Jaworski, A. (1997). *Silence-Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, Inc.
- Jaworski, A. and Sachdev, I. (1998). "Beliefs about Silence in the Classroom". *Language and Education*, vol. 12, pp. 273-292.
- Jordan, R.R. (2009). *English for Academic Purposes: A Guide and Resource Book for Teachers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Juniati, S. R., Jabu, B., and Salija, K. (2018). "Students' silence in the EFL speaking classroom". The 65th TEFLIN International Conference, July, 90–94
- Koizumi, R. (2005). Relationships between Productive Vocabulary Knowledge and Speaking Performance of Japanese Learners of English at the Novice Level, Ph.D. Diss. University of Tsukuba.
- Liu, J. and Mou, X. (2008). "An Ethnographic Study on Silence in the Chinese EFL Class of English Linguistic Postgraduates", *ICS Journal*, vol. 1, n. pp.
- King, J. (2013a). *Silence in the second language classroom*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- King, J. (2013b). "Silence in the second language classrooms of Japanese universities". *Applied Linguistics*, 34(3), 325–343.
- King, J. Yashima, T., Humphries, S., Aubrey, S. and Ikeda, M. (2020). "Silence and Anxiety in the English-Medium Classroom of Japanese Universities: A Longitudinal Intervention Study".
- Nakane, I. (2002). "Silence in the multicultural classroom: perceptions and performance in Australian university classrooms". *Intercultural Studies*, (2-1), 17-28.
- Nakane, I. (2007). "Silence in Intercultural Communication: Perceptions and Performance". Vol. 166. Amsterdam: John Benjamin.
- Ollin, R. (2008). "Silent pedagogy and rethinking classroom practice: structuring teaching through silence rather than talk". *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol.38, pp. 265-280.
- Reda, M. M. (2009). *Between Speaking and Silence: A Study of Quiet Students*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Richmond, V. P., Wrench, J.S. and McCroskey, J C. (2013). *Communication Apprehension, Avoidance, and Effectiveness*. 6th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1988), 'Private speech: Evidence for language learning strategies during the 'silent' period', *Journal of Child Language*, 15, (3), 567-90.
- Townsend, J. S. (1998). "Silent Voices: What Happens to Quiet Students during Classroom Discussions?" *English Journal* 87 (2):72–80.
- Tsui, A. (1996). *Reticence and anxiety in second language learning*. In K. M. Bailey & D. Nunan (eds.). *Voices from the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tok, H. (2009). "EFL Learners' Communication Obstacles". *Electronic Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 8, pp. 84-100.
- Walliman, N. (2011). *Research methods: The basics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wilson, D. (2005). *Strategic silence in Nigerian politics*. In D Wilson New perspective in Applied Communication. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig) Ltd.
- Zembylas, M. and Vrasidas, C. (2007). "Listening for Silence in Text-Based, Online Encounters". *Distance Education*, vol. 28, pp. 5-24.

پوخته

گهلهك ماموستا روب روی بیدهنگی د وانین زمانی بین تایهت ب وان دبن. گهلهك قهكولین ل سهر هویین بیدهنگی و بهربه لاقبوونا وی د بواری فیرکونا زمانین بیانی دا هاتینه نهجامدان. بهلی تا نوکه چ قهكولین لسهر قوتابی کورد وهك فیربویهکی زمانی ئینگیزی وهك زمانهکی بیانی نه هاتیه نهجامدان. لهورا ئهف قهكولینه ل دور دیاردهیا پیگیریا قوتابیت کورد ب بیدهنگی لدهمی وانین زمانی ئینگیزی وهك زمانهکی بیانی دگهرییت.

ئامارین قی قهكولینی ب دهست قه هاتینه ب ریکا بکارئینانا پرسهنامهیهکا پرسیار گرتی کو بو هژمارهیهکا قوتابیین بهشی زمانی ئینگیزی- کولیژا زمان- زانکویا دهوک هاتیه بهرهفکرن. 60 قوتابیا پهشداری تیدا کریه (30 رهگزی می و 30 رهگزی نیر) , و لدویف نهجاما کهلهك هوکار هه نه کو د بنه ئهگهر کو قوتابی بمینته بی دهنگ د هولاً خاندنی قه وهك هوکارین زمانی و دهرونی و میتودولوجی. نهجام بومه جیاوازییهکا دیار دناف بهرا ههردوو رهگزاندا ژ لایه هوکارین وان دهلیته بی دهنگ دیار دکهت.

الخلاصة

یواجه العديد من الاساتذة ظاهرة الصمت في فصول اللغة الخاصة بهم. درست أبحاث كثيرة أسباب الصمت وانتشاره في مجال تدريس اللغات الأجنبية. ومع ذلك ، لم يتم إجراء أي دراسة حول العوامل الكامنة وراء ظاهرة صمت لدى طلاب الكورد كمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تبحث هذه الدراسة في ظاهرة التزام الطلاب بالصمت أثناء دروس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تم الحصول على بيانات هذه الدراسة من خلال استخدام استبيان مغلقة الاسئلة مع مجموعة متكونة من 60 طالب وطالبة (30 من الذكور و 30 من الإناث الذين يدرسون في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية / كلية اللغات / جامعة دهوك. وفقا للنتائج ، هناك العديد من العوامل التي تساهم في بقاء الطلاب صامتين في الفصل. وتشمل هذه العوامل أسباب لغوية ونفسية ومنهجية . تظهر النتائج اختلافا واضحا بين الذكور والإناث من حيث الأسباب التي تجعلهم صامتين داخل الفصل الدراسي.