

STUDENTS' SILENCE IN EFL CLASSROOM: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS AND IDENTITIES

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Abstract

Investigating the issue of students' silence is essential since it is considered to discourage students from actively participating in the teaching and learning process. Students' silence has been investigated from a variety of angles. Nonetheless, there has not been any discussion of EFL students' silence regarding their identities in the Indonesian context yet. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the factors that influenced the students' silence in the EFL classroom and the identities that they constructed during the period of silence. To reach the objectives, a qualitative approach was employed. Five students studying English in an English skill class at a university in Aceh participated in this study. The data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The results of this study show that four factors influenced the students' silence, including being threatened with the presence of classmates or lecturers, being in a too silent class, a lack of comprehension of the studied material, and a lack of confidence. Furthermore, the findings also reveal that the students formed multiple identities during the period of their silence in their EFL classes. The identities underwent development, shaping, and reshaping. This study provides a new insight that, beyond their silence, the students actually actively constructed their multiple identities.

Keywords: students' silence, students' identities, EFL students

INTRODUCTION

Students' silence is a common phenomenon in a classroom. It has been acknowledged that students' silence, or lack of speaking, is an issue in the classroom (Kandilla, Dewi, & Pujasari, 2021). This is particularly true in language learning settings, since a substantial amount of research suggests that verbal engagement and oral output of the target language are crucial for language acquisition and L2 development (Smith & King, 2018). Silence has become a barrier to the relationship between teachers and students, which makes it challenging to achieve academic objectives in a way that is detrimental to the language proficiency of the students (Juma, Husiyin, Akhat, & Habibulla, 2022). Students' silence might be interpreted as their shyness, disinterest, lack of preparedness, and hostility (Panofsky & Bogad, 2011). Different types of silence constitute a complex and nuanced cultural phenomenon; therefore, it is also possible to interpret students' silence as a submissive stance toward class order and respect for teachers (Peng, Kang, Shi, & Liu, 2023).

Silence has long been associated with second language learners in Southeast Asia; it is commonly assumed that these learners do not engage in spoken English exchanges due to communicative competency issues, opportunity constraints, and cultural differences (Jin, 2017). There has been research done on EFL students' silence, particularly in Indonesia. The topics examined included the factors influencing students' silence in the EFL classroom (Pratama, Purwanti, & Yeni, 2021; Zafarina, 2022); teachers' perceptions of students' silence (Kandila, Dewi, & Pujasari, 2021); students' silence in relation to teachers' roles (Azizah, Suparno & Supriyadi, 2022; Bahar, Purwati & Setiawan, 2022); silence as a communication strategy (Fadilah, Widiati & Latief, 2019); students' perceptions of silence and culture (Santosa & Mardiana, 2018); students' emotion and silence (Perkasa, Savitri, Yogyantoro, 2022); and the correlation between silence and online learning (Nurrohmah & Waloyo, 2021). Numerous perspectives on the subject of student silence have been covered in these works; nevertheless, the relationship between student silence and identity has not yet been explored.

One of the factors influencing students' silence in college classrooms is identity (Panofsky & Bogad, 2011). It affects students' intents and desires to participate in the classroom (Jin, 2017). Students' identities shape the ways silence is produced and interpreted in the classroom (Taylor, 2020). Students might interpret silence differently. According to Nurjain, Nurjain, Fajriah, and Sari (2023), instead of actually speaking their minds and risking being misunderstood by others, students may think it is far better to remain silent. Additionally, they may think that if they say nothing at all, the teachers will comprehend it, and this is how they are supposed to learn. They may also believe that keeping silence would help to keep the dynamics of the classroom harmonious.

Considering the background mentioned above, this study is important to be carried out for two reasons. First, it is crucial to understand the meaning of silence in the classroom and the identities of silent EFL students to help address the challenges it poses, inform pedagogical approaches, and fill the literature gap of EFL students' silence in relation to their identities in the Indonesian context. Second, it is imperative to specifically conduct this study in the Acehnese-specific context of Indonesia, which is understudied, to give new insight to the literature regarding students' silence and identities in this very specific context. Context is key to understanding the roots and meanings of silence (King, 2016). According to Zafarina (2022), it is believed that many Indonesian students prefer to react to activities in class silently. Many of them keep quiet for a long time before saying something, even though some activities require verbal contact.

Based on the above background regarding students' silence, the purpose of this study is to look into two important points. The first is what caused the EFL students to be silent during their English class. What comes second are the identities that the EFL students constructed during their silent period.

Students' Silence

Human communication is inextricably linked to silence, which conveys messages that can have quite complex meanings (Al Jahdhami, 2018; Perkasa, 2022). Scholars have different perspectives behind silence (Amur, Bukhari, & Lashari, 2023). Silence is associated with an absence of speech and even a complete absence of hearable verbalization that is extended to involve learners who are not present on a certain topic (Juma et al., 2022). Silence is a social activity that could be culturally specific, nevertheless. For instance, it is frequently asserted that East Asian societies, including China, Japan, and Korea, demonstrate politeness more frequently through silence (Wang & Moskal, Schweisfurth, 2020). According to Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), unlike European-American children, whose cultures value speaking as the ultimate form of communication, native American youngsters might learn more by just watching the world in silence.

According to Tang et al. (2020), silence in the classroom is the result of students not actively participating in class engagement over an extended period of time. Students' silence in class is often attributed to a variety of factors, including gender and age, classroom norms, anxiety related to learning a foreign language, and cultural background (Wan, 2021). Silence is influenced by culture. Especially in eastern cultures, students sometimes answer questions from their teachers in silence (Santosa & Mardiana). The term "silence" designates a vague phenomenon that may not only be distorted by verbal communication ceasing but also function as a component of it. It is possible that learners were simply adapting their thoughts to the pertinent issue being discussed rather than being perceived as having restricted participation during the entire talk (Bao, 2014; Bernales, 2016; Fadilah, Widiati, and Latief, 2019). Also, silence in the classroom in the form of non-participation is usually perceived unfavorably, which frequently causes participants to feel adversely. Students' and teachers' emotional and pedagogical behaviors are frequently impacted by the silence and the ensuing unfavorable classroom atmosphere (Smith & King, 2018). King (2013) states that in a foreign language classroom where students are encouraged to communicate verbally, silence may indicate that they are not connecting with the material or developing their speaking competency in the language.

Identity in Language Learning

Gee (2000) defines identity as “acting and interacting as a ‘certain kind of person’” (p. 100) and contends that people form affinity identities through engaging in particular social activities. No one has a single, consistent language; thus, no one has a single, consistent identity. As a result, people constantly create new identities for themselves (Gee, 2007; Kumaradivelu, 2012; Wirza, 2018). In the language learning context, identity plays an important role. Norton (2010) argues that language is understood not just as a “linguistic system but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities are negotiated” (p. 351). Block (2007) adds that research on foreign language learning in EFL settings shows that when students grow more proficient in the language, their identities become a source of contention and conflict. According to Teng (2019), classrooms are seen as battlegrounds in EFL teaching and learning, where the demands of language acquisition impact how learners form their identities. Teng (2019, p. 44) argues that “individual and social identities are often dynamic, interactive, discursive, contradictory, and contextually situated as a result of the mismatch between imagined and practiced communities.”

Learner identity can be understood as the way a learner comprehends their relationship to the target language, other languages, and the outside world; how that relationship is formed across time and space; and how they perceive their future prospects (Pastor, 2018; Norton, 2014). According to Norton (1997), language learners develop their identities every time they speak. This aligns with Hatam and Sa (2017), who point out that language learners oscillate between perceiving themselves as first language (L1) speakers and understanding that they are second language (L2) learners, or how they define themselves.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach since it allowed educational researchers to understand the complexity of teaching and learning practices and the contexts in which they are embedded (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). The use of a qualitative approach in this study enabled the researcher to deeply examine students’ silence through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

Participants

This study was conducted in an English language skill class at a university in Aceh during semester 2 of the academic year 2023-2024. The participants were five students: Alamanda, Lili, Mawar, Melati, and Seruni (all names are pseudonyms). Purposive sampling

was used to select the participants. The researcher chose the participants because they would participate in this study voluntarily and they could be key informants who contributed to the researchers' understanding of students' silence in an EFL classroom. As Campbell et al. (2020) argue, purposive sampling is appropriately used because it includes the participants that provide useful information and allows for the selection of cases that will use limited research resources effectively.

Instruments

Two types of data collection methods were used in this study, including classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. According to Fasse and Kolodner (2000), participant observation is a viable strategy to address the classroom setting and identify specific trends among the students observed there. Researchers can conduct in-depth interactions with participants during semi-structured interviews, which makes them effective (Kakila, 2021).

Procedures

The researcher employed participant classroom observations since she was the participants' instructor in their English language skill class. She observed the participants directly while teaching English skills to them. She used field notes to record the participants' silent episodes when they emerged. Qualitative researchers are recommended to take field notes to enhance data and provide rich context for analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). To avoid the destruction, she just made short notes in the classroom and completed them after she left the classroom. Some examples of the participants' silent episodes were when the researchers greeted them or asked questions, the students were involved in small group or pair work speaking activities, or the students were asked to give their opinions.

Semi-structured interviews were another tool the researcher used to get more detailed data. She notably addressed questions about how the participants connected their silence to their identities and probed them more regarding the silent moments that surfaced throughout the observations. For thirty or forty minutes, the participants were interviewed.

Data analysis

To analyze the data in this study, the researcher followed four stages of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hemming, Pratt, Bhatti, Shaw, & Haddock, 2021). Stage 1 is familiarization. The researcher transcribed the audio recording of the interviews. She familiarized herself with the observation and interview data by reading and rereading the field notes and transcripts of the data. Stage 2 is the initial code. The researcher coded the interesting and significant data. Themes and theme reviews comprise Stage 3. She sorted

codes into potential themes and collated the coded extracts within each theme. Theme definition and report writing are part of stage 4. She defined the appropriate names of each themes and wrote the report of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are reported in this section. The study's findings address the factors influencing EFL students' silence as well as the identities that were shaped by it.

The Factors Influencing the EFL Students' Silence

Being threatened with the presence of classmates or lecturers

Based on the interviews, the participants mentioned that the presence of classmates and lecturers became a reason for them to stay quiet because it could threaten their ability to talk. Alamanda, Mawar, and Seruni related their silence to their lack of ability in English. Alamanda stated that her silence was because she was not proficient enough in English and was afraid of being joked at by her classmate if she spoke mistakenly. Mawar and Seruni argued that they stayed quiet because they were shy about talking in front of their classmates and lecturers. The following three excerpts show the details of their comments, respectively.

When my instructors begin a question-and-answer period, I remain silent. Answering their queries makes me nervous and hesitant, especially if I have to use English. I worry about what my classmates would think of me if I made mistakes. I had a negative experience since my classmates made fun of me when I made mistakes with my English (Alamanda).

I'm keeping quiet out of concern that I'll make mistakes. If I give an incorrect response, I will be shy around classmates and lecturers. English is quite difficult; that's why I am afraid of making mistakes if I speak (Mawar).

I choose to be silent in the classroom because I am shy, especially in new classes where I meet classmates and lecturers I don't yet recognize. I decide to keep silent, although I have questions I want to ask (Seruni).

I would rather stay quiet in the class because, when I speak, most people are insecure and don't want to voice their opinions anymore. I would rather stay quiet and give them the opportunity so that they can talk and express their opinions. They think my English is good, so they should not speak and give their opinion anymore because they make mistakes and cannot speak as fluently as I do. My English is good because I grew up in Australia and am surrounded by people who speak English all the time. So English comes to me naturally (Melati).

The final excerpt above reveals that Melati was threatened by the presence of their classmates. Different from Alamanda, Mawar, and Seruni, whose silence was due to their lack of competence in English, Melati was quiet because she had high proficiency in English. If she talked actively, her friends would keep silent since they considered their English as not as good as hers. She kept silent to let her classmates talk.

Too silent class

The participant's silence was prompted, in part, by the excessive silence in the class. In the next two excerpts, Mawar and Seruni acknowledged that they were completely impacted by a too-quiet classroom and did not make an attempt to encourage more activity.

It's too quiet in class, so I'm keeping quiet. Nobody responded, not even when the instructor posed a question (Mawar).

I'm quiet since my classmates are quiet as well. I am unable to talk, particularly after a lengthy period of silence in the class. All of my classmates would be staring at me if I spoke. That is not what I want to happen. Being in the spotlight is something I dislike (Seruni).

This class has very few active participants. They would rather keep silent and avoid conversation. I feel horrible about that sometimes. I try not to speak much and to use advanced vocabulary; I simply try to be supportive. When they are invited to speak in front of the class, I also frequently give them smiles and encouraging hand gestures to encourage them to talk (Melati).

The final excerpt above emphasized Melati's unpleasant feelings toward the silent class. She did not totally accept this condition; she kept silent and gave positive body language as well, with the hope that her classmates would start talking.

A Lack of comprehension of the studied material

Furthermore, the participants considered that their lack of ability to understand the materials was the next reason for their silence. Alamanda, Lili, and Seruni argued that their silence in the classroom was because they did not comprehend the materials learned. The following three excerpts show the details.

I keep silent because I don't fully comprehend the materials. I fear that I might make mistakes if I comment on the stuff that I do not yet fully grasp. I would thus rather not say anything (Alamanda).

I stay quiet when I don't know about a certain topic. I am not brave enough to speak in that condition. For example, during the listening practice, I stay silent a lot because I can't catch the points that the speakers are making in the audio. I also stay quiet if I don't know the vocabulary to use (Lili).

My limited proficiency in English has an impact on my silence (Seruni).

I will keep silent if I don't understand the materials. I think being silent has been a tradition here when students don't master a certain topic. Especially in this class, most of the students are silent. In my opinion, we don't master English well; our English is still very basic (Mawar).

As shown in the excerpt above, Mawar also believed that her lack of comprehension of the subject matter contributed to her silence. She also made the generalization that the silence was a shared custom, implying that either she or her classmates' silence was the result of a lack of material comprehension.

A Lack of Confidence

Another factor that influenced the participants' silence was a lack of confidence. In the following excerpt, Alamanda admitted that the reason behind her silence in the classroom was because she was not confident enough to express her ideas. She was afraid that the ideas were not true.

I am not confident in myself. I am afraid if I talk, the ideas may be incorrect. Sometimes I just express my ideas to the classmates that are next to me (Alamanda).

There are moments when I lack confidence in my own skills. I will occasionally attempt to speak if I am knowledgeable about a subject, but I would much rather remain silent if I am not (Lili).

In the excerpt above, Lili expressed doubts about her English language skills, which she said contributed to her lack of confidence and caused her to be silent in class. If she understood the material she was learning, she claimed, she could be more engaged..

Students' Identities

Introverted person

Seruni acknowledged that she was an introverted person, which was why she remained silent in class, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

My introverted nature has caused me to be silent. I have things to share, but if there aren't many people speaking in the classroom, I will remain silent. I am not a talker. (Seruni).

Based on the above excerpt, Seruni believed that her introverted personality shaped her identity as a non-talker.

Learners who blamed themselves

While being silent in their classes, the participants actively constructed their identities, blaming themselves. From the following excerpt, it appears that Alamanda did not accept her silence in the classroom. Her mind began to race with questions in response to her silence.

I often blame myself because I am silent. Why do I remain silent? How come I don't participate in the class? Why do I fear that my peers will evaluate me poorly? (Alamanda)

I believe I will achieve nothing in the classroom if I just remain silent. I feel like I can't grow as a successful person while I'm quiet. It was my duty to be engaged. When I keep quiet, I feel guilty (Mawar).

The above excerpt shows that Mawar blamed herself for being silent, which prevented him from shaping her identity as a successful person.

Learner intimidated by an exceptional classmate

The participants, including Seruni, Alamanda, and Mawar, admitted that they kept silent in their classes because they felt intimidated by an exceptional student's high English proficiency. The following excerpts reveal the details.

I am silent because I am afraid of making mistakes. I am depressed about an exceptional classmate in our class. Her proficiency in English is outstanding (Seruni).

I feel intimidated by a classmate whose ability is above average; I worry the lecturer will grade us based on proficiency (Alamanda).

I'm from a remote island where our schooling does not emphasize English. That is the reason for my poor English. Many students at this university speak English well. One

student in our class, for instance, speaks English rather well. She sometimes causes me to be silent. I can't talk like her, which makes me intimidated (Mawar).

Due to their experiences of being with this proficient classmate, they formed their identities as the learners intimidated by an exceptional classmate.

A dissatisfied student and a pretender

The excerpts below show that Melati was considered to have high proficiency in English by her classmates in her classroom. Although she chose to remain silent in order to give them an opportunity to respond, they did not break their silence. She constructed her identity as a disappointed learner in this class because of her classmates' silence.

I am disappointed with this class because most of the students choose to keep silent and are too afraid to give their opinions (Melati).

Since they believe their English is not as good as mine, I am aware that several of my classmates lack confidence in themselves. Because of this, whenever they have a chance to speak, I will pretend to be silent and to be staring at my phone, giving the impression that I am preoccupied and won't be listening to them (Melati).

The excerpt above also demonstrates how, while being a dissatisfied student, Melati created a false identity as a pretender by acting silent and not paying attention to her peers when they spoke. Her actions were meant to motivate her classmate to talk.

Self-motivator

The following excerpts show that the participants were aware of their silence in the classroom and disliked these silent moments.

I believe it is abnormal when the class is extremely silent. On the other hand, I remain silent because my classmates do not speak. We're all drowning in silence, then. I genuinely wish I could be doing anything in that circumstance. I ask myself, "Why am I silent?" and "If I'm silent, how can I study?" (Lili)

I dislike how silent I seem to be in this situation. "What justifies my silence?" "What are the advantages of maintaining silence?" "I won't learn much if I stay silent in class; it's not good." "Students ought to be involved" (Seruni).

I tell myself, "I am silent. Don't remain quiet! If you remain silent, you won't grow. Make an effort to reply! It is time for you to stop being silent and start taking action. Practice makes perfect. Try to unwind and communicate in English" (Alamanda).

To respond to their silence, the participants made a self-monologue; they shaped their identities as self-motivators by asking and declaring to themselves not to be silent and convincing themselves of the disadvantages of being silent and the advantages of speaking up.

Learners who asked friends or Google

The participants also shaped their identities as the students who asked friends or Google during their silent moment in class. The formation of Mawar and Alamanda's identities is explained in the next two excerpts. Mawar constructed her identity as a student who asked Google to find answers to questions she had about the content she was studying in class. She did not feel confident enough to ask the questions in class. Alamanda, in the meantime, developed her identity as a student who consulted a friend. Because friends conversed informally, she felt more at ease with them.

I would rather remain silent and not ask my lecturers questions if I don't fully comprehend a topic in class. I'll look it up on Google to find the solution. I'm hesitant and terrified to inquire in class (Mawar).

If there are any subjects that I do not understand, I will ask my friends to clarify. In the classroom, I lack the courage to question my lecturers. Whenever I had doubts, I chose to remain silent. I feel more comfortable asking friends; therefore, that's why I like it. I have informal conversations with my friends about the subject (Alamanda).

If I don't understand something, I'll pull out my phone and Google it; if I can figure it out from the Google response, I won't need to question anyone. I'll ask my friends if I'm still confused. If there is something I don't understand, I would rather keep quiet than ask my instructors. I started doing this as a habit while I was in senior high school. (Melati).

The above excerpt indicates that Melati formed her identity as the learner who asked Google or friends. She would not ask her lecturers in the classroom, although she did not understand the material. Instead, Google would be her first choice to ask, and her friends would be her second.

Learners who try to break the silence

In the last class meetings, the participants made an effort to change their identities from being quiet learners at the start of the session to more engaged learners. After getting to know the other students in the class, Lili felt more confident enough to break the silence. The specifics of her remarks are detailed in the excerpt that follows.

I had a hard time adjusting to new people, so when this class started, I was really quiet. With intelligent friends, I lacked confidence as well. This class is far too quiet, so after spending some time observing, I'm attempting to participate more now. I want to be an engaged student because I want to respect my instructor and get better at English (Lili).

I was initially uneasy in this class because the majority of the students were so quiet. Although most of the students were too quiet, I still wanted to speak. I've started being more active recently as a result of watching my classmates get more involved and as a result of our growing intimacy (Seruni).

In the above excerpt, as argued by Lili, Seruni also formed her identity as a learner, breaking the class's silence after getting in touch more closely with other class members.

Learners who do not believe "silence is gold"

The saying "silence is gold" is an Indonesian proverb. However, in the EFL learning context, the students defined themselves as the ones who believed "silence is not gold." The following excerpts show the details of their comments.

Learning English requires us to develop speaking abilities, which means speaking frequently. Silence is not gold when it comes to learning the language; rather, silence is valuable when we choose to keep quiet in order to avoid causing trouble with others (Alamanda).

When learning in a classroom, silence is not gold since it prevents us from voicing our opinions. Students would, in my opinion, regret remaining silent throughout the teaching and learning process after class because they did not receive the necessary resources (Seruni).

In a classroom setting, silence is not always gold. Enhancing knowledge and skills is the aim of our presence in the classroom. Thus, we ought to speak up. We should remain silent when our classmates or teachers are speaking (Lili).

Silence is not gold in the classroom context. It just fits the context when people have arguments or get angry at one another. So I think people should be quiet in that context

in order to not make other people upset. So silence is not relevant in our classroom (Melati).

When we are learning in the classroom, silence is not gold because we converse, exchange ideas, and express ourselves. How can we grow personally if we remain silent? (Mawar)

The above excerpts reveal the students' beliefs that the classroom is a place for students to speak up, express themselves, and share ideas. "Silent is gold" is more applicable outside of the classroom, particularly when trying to foster harmony between people.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, there are some factors that affected the EFL student teachers silence in the classroom, including being threatened with the presence of classmates or lecturers, being in a too silent class, a lack of comprehension of the studied material, and a lack of confidence. Feeling intimidated by classmates or instructors was the first contributing factor. The participants' perceived intimidation was a result of their limited English skills. This finding is in line with Perkasa, Savitri, and Yogyantoro's study (2022), which showed that Indonesian EFL junior high school students felt anxious to speak English in the classroom due to the presence of their teachers and classmates. Jain and Sidhu (2013) suggest that teachers can foster an effective learning environment by implementing more interaction-based learning in the classroom. This will allow students to practice speaking the language without fear of embarrassment or intimidation from others, while also helping them to become more proficient in it. Excessive silence in the class became the next factor that affected the participants' silence. The participants were uncomfortable with the situation because it made their silence worse and negatively impacted their learning activities. As argued by Bao and Thanh-My (2020) in their study's findings, prolonged periods of quiet could have a detrimental effect on learning since they may have low learning impacts.

The next factor that influenced the participants' silence in the EFL classroom was their lack of comprehension of the studied material. This result was consistent with Zafarina's (2022) study findings, which revealed that EFL learners at a senior high school stayed silent because they could not get along with the assigned subject. Due to a lack of understanding, a student may be reluctant to engage in class because they may think they are unable to finish the assignment; they may find the textbook difficult to read; or they may lack the prior information needed to relate the material to their own experiences (Mukundan & Hajimohammadi, 2011). Lack of confidence was the last factor that led to the participants' silence during the teaching and learning process in their EFL classes. The participants were

not confident enough to express their ideas in English. Nurrohmah and Waloyo's (2021) study also showed that in another Indonesian context, the students who were not confident enough with their English proficiency chose to keep silent when their teachers asked them to answer questions. According to Arifin (2017), low-confidence students frequently struggle to regulate their behavior when giving a speech in front of the class. Examples of this include losing confidence in oneself, supposing that friends are criticizing them, and being terrified of making mistakes.

Furthermore, the research results show that the EFL students constructed their identities in their silence during the teaching and learning process in their classes. The first type of identity that the participant perceived was that of an introverted learner. Based on her perception, her introverted personality was connected to her silent identity. According to Ünalı, Tekin, and Kaçmaz's (2024) study, there is a connection between self-perceived identity and self-perceived personality traits. It means that one factor that determined the student to choose to be a silent learner was her self-perceived personality traits as an introverted learner. In addition, the study's participants formed their identities as students who placed the blame for their silent periods in their EFL classrooms on themselves. Their inability to engage in active learning in the classroom caused them to raise questions about themselves. In their study, Bacova and Turner (2023) categorized blaming oneself as part of a feeling of vulnerability where someone struggles to recognize themselves; it is part of identity construction. In this study, the participant felt vulnerable when they reflected on the negative effects of their silence.

The participants also constructed their identities as learners who were intimidated by an exceptional classmate, making them silent because they felt insecure about their English proficiency. Medina's (2017) study also showed a similar result: a student positioned her identity as a less competent English speaker because she felt intimidated by the presence of a more competent classmate. Students who look down on themselves and compare themselves to others are among those who feel uneasy in their academic lives; as a result, they need the support of their teachers (Hartini et al., 2023). The exceptional student, who also took part in this study, made the decision to remain silent throughout class so that her classmates could speak up in hushed tones. She established her identity as a pretender by acting silent to get her peers to talk, but she also shaped her identity as a disappointed learner as a result of the silent classroom. This study corroborated Teng's (2019) findings, which showed that although a student may have dissatisfaction with her learning environment, she may be able to manage

the situation. As Lamb (2011) suggests, when students are able to manage themselves and their learning, it means they experience learning autonomy.

Furthermore, the students form their identities as self-motivators as a result of their silence in their classes. They motivated themselves to break the silence and speak up. As suggested by Tarhan and Balban (2014), motivation is part of learners' identities; motivation is a crucial aspect that influences a language learner. The next identity that the students formed due to their silence was as learners who asked friends or Google. They preferred asking Google or friends to ask the instructors directly in their classes. Google is a useful tool to assist students' learning because it could foster their learning autonomy (Borova et al., 2021). Peer-assisted learning, as this study's participants preferred, was also supported in Glynn's et al.'s (2006) study, as it could create a safe learning environment for the learners. Williams and Reddy (2016) highlighted the advantages of peer-assisted learning. Because of this, students in practical classes may experience less peer pressure, which boosts their confidence in their ability to do the necessary skill.

This study's participants also constructed their identities as the learners who tried to break their silence in their classroom. During the silence period, they tried to reshape their identities from being quiet students to being more active learners. According to Saylag (2014), it is very challenging to break silence in the classroom; if an individual feels they are not themselves, it will make them feel prisoned in their own silence. In the case of the participants in this study, they tried to be themselves and free themselves from their silence by starting to communicate with other class members. Lastly, students also shaped the identities of learners who do not think that "silence is gold." Despite the Indonesian cultural belief that "silence is gold," they stressed that silence almost had no place in the teaching and learning environment. According to Jones (2011), silence has multiple meanings and uses in Japanese culture, and it consists of various meanings and functions. Silence is an integral aspect of communication. This study's participants suggested that because silence inhibited their personal development, it could, in part, serve no useful purpose in classroom communication.

This study's results revealed that during the silence period in classes, the students shaped multiple identities. It proved the multiple concepts of identity. Individuals hold multiple identities, or self-conceptions, that are formed through experiences, behavior, and social relationships (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The study also suggested that the construction of identities involved the interaction between the students and their classmates. The study's

result is in line with the concept of identity emerging through social interactions (Scanlon et al., 2007). Also, this study showed that the students' identities changed over time, for example, from being totally silent students to the students who tried to break the silence. As Henry (2021) suggests, identity is dynamic and evolves; identities are shaped and reshaped over time and influenced by various factors.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the EFL students silence was examined in terms of the factors that influenced the students' silence in the classroom and the identities that the students constructed during their silence period. Four factors influenced the students silence. First, the students were threatened with the presence of classmates or lecturers. Second, they studied in excessive silence in the class. Third, they lacked comprehension of the studied material. Fourth, they were not confident enough to speak up. The analysis of this study also reveals that the students formed multiple identities during the period of their silence in their EFL classes. They included an introverted person, learners who blamed themselves, learners intimidated by an exceptional classmate, a dissatisfied student and a pretender, self-motivators, learners who asked friends or Google, learners who tried to break the silence, and learners who do not believe "silence is gold". Since the investigation of this research is limited to a university in the Acehnese context, it is recommended to expand further study in school or other university contexts in Indonesia. This study was conducted in one classroom; as a result, the findings of this study are limited to a specific classroom context only. Exploring students' silence and identities across different classrooms is crucial for future research.

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