

Unveiling silence: Exploring factors influencing silent behavior in adult EFL learners and its impact on language skill development and academic achievement

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 1 May 2024

Revised 23 July 2024

Accepted 25 July 2024

Keywords

Silent Behavior

EFL Classes

Student Silence

ABSTRACT

The silent behavior in class is a common phenomenon in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and can have a negative impact on the learning process. This research aims to identify the factors influencing silent behavior in adult EFL learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta and analyze its impact on English language skill development, classroom interaction, and academic achievement. The research methodology includes descriptive qualitative research using a literature review approach, supplemented by in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The study focuses on English Education students attending Speaking classes. The data collected will be analyzed to identify internal and external factors influencing silent behavior and its impact on the learning process. The results indicate that communication anxiety, lack of confidence, non-interactive teaching methods, unsupportive classroom environments, and cultural factors are the main causes of silent behavior in class. This behavior inhibits English language skill development, reduces classroom interaction, and negatively impacts students' academic achievement. The implications of this research suggest the need for a holistic and inclusive approach to address silent behavior in class, including creating supportive learning environments, using interactive teaching methods, and providing support to reduce anxiety and boost students' confidence. Thus, it is hoped that the English language learning process at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta can become more effective and inclusive.

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How to Cite: Gustriani, P. V. (2024). Unveiling silence: Exploring factors influencing silent behavior in adult EFL learners and its impact on language skill development and academic achievement. *International Undergraduate Conference on English Education*, 3(1), 93-102.

1. Introduction

Research on silent behavior in the context of EFL in the classroom has been conducted by various researchers worldwide. Research by Chung (2021) shows that communication anxiety is one of the main causes of silent behavior in EFL classes. Maher and King (2022) found that anxious students tend to avoid speaking to reduce the risk of negative assessment and embarrassment. This research also reveals that support from teachers and a positive classroom environment can help reduce anxiety and encourage active participation. Tang et al. (2020) in his research found that factors such as teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, and classroom dynamics play a crucial role in influencing students' silent behavior. This research also emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable and motivated to speak.

Chen Shan (2020) found that collective culture and social norms have a significant influence on students' silent behavior. In collective cultures, students tend to avoid risks and prefer to remain silent rather than make mistakes in public. This research also reveals that the role of teachers is crucial in creating a classroom atmosphere that supports active participation. Doiron (2020) in his research, shows that shame and fear of losing face are dominant factors causing students to be reluctant to speak in class. This research focuses on adult EFL learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta. The university is known for its comprehensive and diverse EFL programs, involving students from various backgrounds and ages. Adult learners often face different challenges compared to younger learners, including job demands, family responsibilities, and prior learning experiences. This case study will explore silent behavior in the classroom among adult learners taking English courses as part of their curriculum.

This research analyzed internal factors such as communication anxiety, learning motivation, and language skills, as well as external factors such as teaching methods, classroom environment, and teacher-student relationships. Additionally, the study explored the impact of silent behavior on the learning process, classroom interaction, and academic achievement of students. By understanding the factors influencing silent behavior, effective strategies were identified to enhance students' verbal participation in English language learning.

The research aimed to identify the factors causing silent behavior in adult EFL learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta. It analyzed the impact of silent behavior on classroom dynamics, student-teacher interactions, and academic achievement. The study provided recommendations to address silent behavior and enhance verbal participation in EFL learning. The benefits of the research were expected to contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive English teaching methods. Additionally, the research aimed to provide insights to educators on motivating students to participate more actively in class. Thus, the research was beneficial not only to students and educators at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta but also to other higher education institutions facing similar challenges in EFL learning. Silent behavior in the classroom was a complex phenomenon influenced by various internal and external factors. In-depth investigation into silent behavior among adult EFL learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta provided a better understanding of its causes and impacts. The research also aimed to find effective solutions to address silent behavior and improve students' verbal participation in English language learning. Therefore, it was hoped that a more dynamic, inclusive, and supportive learning environment could be created, promoting optimal development of English language skills among adult learners.

2. Method

The research methodology used in this study is descriptive qualitative with a literature review approach. Descriptive qualitative research aims to describe phenomena in-depth and comprehensively, allowing the researcher to better understand silent behavior in the classroom among adult EFL learners (Sugiyono, 2017). The literature review is used to examine various theories, concepts, and previous research findings relevant to this topic. Through this approach, the researcher can identify factors causing silent behavior, its impact on learning, and effective strategies to address this issue. Data collection is conducted through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with students, and analysis of documents related to English language learning at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta.

The data sources used in this study are primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained directly from the research subjects, namely students of the English Education Department at Ahmad Dahlan University who are taking Speaking classes. Primary data collection is conducted through participatory observation and in-depth interviews to gain a clear picture of silent behavior in the classroom and the factors influencing it. Secondary data includes academic documents, official reports, and scientific literature that support the analysis and interpretation of primary data (Creswell, 2014). The research location is the Speaking classes at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta, chosen because it is a context where verbal interaction between students and instructors is expected to occur intensively. This research is expected to provide comprehensive insights into silent behavior in the classroom and significant contributions to the development of more effective EFL teaching methods.

3. Findings and Discussion

Interviews with students of the English Education Department at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta revealed that communication anxiety is one of the main factors causing silent behavior in the classroom. Students reported feeling afraid of making mistakes when speaking in English and worried about negative judgment from classmates and lecturers. This fear leads them to prefer remaining silent rather than taking the risk of speaking in public. This finding aligns with Hanh (2020) who found that communication anxiety is a primary cause of silent behavior in EFL classrooms, where students tend to avoid verbal interaction to prevent embarrassment and negative evaluation. In addition to anxiety, the interview results also indicated that a lack of confidence is a significant factor influencing silent behavior. Many students felt that their English skills were not good enough to participate actively in class discussions. They felt unable to construct sentences correctly and were concerned that they would not be understood by others. Alharbi (2021) supports this finding, stating that inadequate language skills can hinder students' verbal participation in EFL classes.

Classroom environment and teaching methods also play a role in influencing students' silent behavior. Some students expressed that they felt uncomfortable speaking in formal and structured classroom settings, where interactions were often dominated by the lecturer. They admitted feeling more at ease speaking in small groups or during more informal activities. Hilliard et al. (2020) found that more interactive teaching methods and a supportive classroom environment could help reduce anxiety and encourage student participation. The importance of a good teacher-student relationship to create a conducive learning atmosphere. Cultural factors also emerged as one of the reasons behind silent behavior in the classroom. Students indicated that in Indonesian culture, particularly in educational contexts, silence is often regarded as a sign of respect and orderliness. They felt reluctant to speak unless directly asked by the lecturer. Research by Wang et al. (2022) shows that cultural and social norms can influence student behavior in the classroom, where students are more likely to remain silent to avoid losing face or making mistakes that could be embarrassing.

From the interviews and supported by previous research, it is clear that silent behavior in the classroom among adult EFL learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta is influenced by various complex and interrelated factors. To address this issue, a holistic and inclusive approach is needed that considers psychological, pedagogical, and cultural aspects. Lecturers need to create a supportive learning environment, adopt more interactive teaching methods, and build good relationships with students to encourage active participation in English language learning.

Based on the interviews with students of the English Education Department at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta, this study reveals that communication anxiety and lack of confidence are the main factors causing silent behavior in the classroom. Students often feel anxious when they have to speak in English, fear making mistakes, and are afraid of negative judgment from classmates and lecturers. This fear leads them to prefer remaining silent rather than taking the risk of speaking in public. Additionally, many students feel that their English skills are not yet adequate, making them hesitant to participate actively in class discussions. They are unsure of their ability to construct correct sentences and fear not being understood by others. This condition shows that communication anxiety and low self-confidence greatly affect students' verbal participation in EFL learning.

This study also found that teaching methods and classroom environments play a crucial role in influencing students' silent behavior. Students reported feeling more comfortable speaking in small groups or informal activities compared to formal and structured classroom settings. A classroom environment dominated by the lecturer and the lack of opportunities for verbal interaction often makes students feel intimidated and reluctant to speak. Additionally, cultural factors also play a significant role, where in Indonesian culture, silence is often considered a sign of respect and order. Students feel reluctant to speak unless directly asked by the lecturer. These findings indicate that cultural and social norms can influence students' behavior in the classroom, where students are more likely to remain silent to avoid losing face or making mistakes that could be embarrassing. Therefore, a holistic and inclusive approach, considering psychological, pedagogical, and cultural aspects, is necessary to address silent behavior in the classroom and encourage more active verbal participation in English language learning.

3.1. Factors Influencing Silent Behavior In The Classroom

Silent behavior in the classroom, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors. Based on the results of research and interviews conducted at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta, several key factors affect silent behavior among adult EFL learners. These factors include communication anxiety, lack of confidence, teaching methods, classroom environment, and cultural factors. This discussion will explore each of these factors in depth (Abdul et al., 2020).

Communication anxiety is one of the main factors causing silent behavior in the classroom. Many adult EFL students at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta reported feeling anxious when they have to speak English in public. This anxiety is often caused by the fear of making mistakes and receiving negative judgment from classmates and lecturers. Same result was found by Perkasa et al. (2022) it was found that communication anxiety is the primary cause of silent behavior in EFL classrooms. Students who feel anxious tend to avoid verbal interaction to reduce the risk of feeling embarrassed and humiliated. Communication anxiety can stem from previous negative experiences, such as being mocked or criticized when speaking English. These experiences can create deep-seated fears, making students reluctant to speak in class. Additionally, the pressure to perform perfectly and the fear of failure can also increase anxiety levels. In this context, communication anxiety not only affects students' speaking abilities but also impacts their overall participation in classroom activities.

Lack of confidence is another significant factor affecting silent behavior in the classroom. Many students feel that their English skills are not good enough to participate actively in class discussions. They often feel uncertain about their ability to construct correct sentences and fear not being understood by others. Research by Collante-Caiafa et al. (2020) supports this finding where the lack of adequate language skills can hinder students' verbal participation in EFL classes. This low confidence leads students to prefer remaining silent rather than risk speaking and making mistakes. Low self-confidence is often associated with negative self-perception. Students who feel that they are not good enough at speaking English tend to believe that their efforts will not be successful. This can lead to a passive attitude and reluctance to participate in class discussions. Furthermore, low confidence can be reinforced by a lack of support from the surrounding environment, including classmates and lecturers (Smith & King, 2020). Lecturers who provide negative feedback or do not offer adequate support can make students feel insecure about speaking in class.

The teaching methods used by lecturers also play a crucial role in influencing students' silent behavior. Some students revealed that they feel uncomfortable speaking in formal and structured classroom situations where interactions are often dominated by the lecturer. They expressed that they feel more comfortable speaking in small groups or during more informal activities. A study by García-Moya et al. (2020) found that more interactive teaching methods and supportive classroom environments can help reduce anxiety and encourage student participation. A good relationship between teachers and students is essential to create a conducive learning atmosphere. Teaching methods that are too rigid and focus on one-way instruction can make students feel pressured and lack opportunities to participate. Conversely, teaching methods that involve group discussions, role-playing, and other interactive activities can provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking in a more relaxed and supportive setting. Additionally, using teaching techniques that emphasize collaborative learning can help reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence. Lecturers who adopt inclusive and supportive teaching approaches can create a more dynamic classroom environment that encourages active participation from all students (Maher & King, 2022).

A conducive classroom environment is crucial for encouraging students' verbal participation. Some students stated that they feel more comfortable speaking in small groups or during more informal activities compared to formal and structured classroom situations. A classroom environment dominated by the lecturer and the lack of opportunities for verbal interaction often makes students feel intimidated and reluctant to speak. This study found that a supportive and interactive classroom atmosphere can help reduce anxiety and encourage student participation. A positive classroom environment is a condition where students feel safe and supported to speak without fear of negative judgment (Hu, 2021). Lecturers play a key role in creating such an environment by demonstrating an open attitude, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging active participation from all students. Furthermore, good relationships among students can also enhance confidence and the willingness to participate. Students who feel accepted and supported by their classmates are more likely to participate

actively in class discussions. Therefore, building good relationships among students and creating a positive classroom environment are essential steps to reduce silent behavior in the classroom.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in influencing silent behavior in the classroom. Students indicated that in Indonesian culture, especially in an educational context, silence is often considered a sign of respect and order. They feel reluctant to speak unless directly asked by the lecturer. Research by Girardelli et al. (2020) shows that cultural and social norms can influence students' behavior in the classroom, where students are more likely to remain silent to avoid losing face or making mistakes that could be embarrassing. In a collective culture like Indonesia, there is a tendency to avoid risks and maintain harmony within the group. Students may feel that speaking up in class could disrupt harmony or cause conflict, so they prefer to remain silent. Additionally, social norms that emphasize respect for authority can make students hesitant to speak unless directly prompted by the lecturer. These cultural factors highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches in addressing silent behavior in the classroom. Lecturers need to understand and respect students' cultural norms while creating an environment that supports active participation.

Previous learning experiences can also influence silent behavior in the classroom. Students who have had negative experiences in learning English, such as being mocked or criticized when speaking, often carry this trauma into new learning situations. These negative experiences can create deep-seated fears, causing students to prefer remaining silent rather than risking speaking. Additionally, experiences with less interactive teaching methods or unsupportive classroom environments can reinforce silent behavior (Hu, 2021). Students who are accustomed to passive, teacher-centered teaching approaches may find it difficult to adapt to more interactive methods that require active participation. Positive learning experiences can build confidence and motivation to participate actively in class. Students who have had successful experiences speaking English, such as receiving praise or support from lecturers and classmates, are more likely to feel confident and motivated to speak more. Therefore, it is important for lecturers to create positive and supportive learning experiences that can help change students' perceptions of their abilities and encourage active participation in the classroom.

The role of lecturers is crucial in influencing students' silent behavior in the classroom. Lecturers who provide support, encouragement, and constructive feedback can help reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence. Conversely, lecturers who are critical, unsupportive, or do not provide opportunities for students to participate actively can exacerbate silent behavior. Research shows that inclusive and supportive teaching approaches can create a more dynamic and participatory learning environment. Teaching approaches that focus on active and collaborative learning can encourage students' verbal participation (Girardelli et al., 2020). For instance, using group discussions, simulations, role-playing, and collaborative projects can provide students with opportunities to practice speaking in a more relaxed and supportive setting. Additionally, lecturers can adopt teaching techniques that involve students directly, such as asking open-ended questions, facilitating class discussions, and assigning tasks that encourage verbal interaction. In this way, lecturers can help create a classroom environment that supports active participation and reduces silent behavior.

The use of technology in English language learning can also influence silent behavior in the classroom. Technology can provide various tools and resources that help students feel more confident and motivated to participate actively. For example, online learning platforms, language apps, and digital collaboration tools can provide a more comfortable environment for students to practice speaking and interacting with classmates and lecturers. Moreover, technology can be used to provide quicker and more personalized feedback, which can help improve students' language skills and confidence (Aubrey et al., 2022). However, technology can also become a barrier if not used appropriately. For instance, excessive or poorly integrated use of technology in the learning process can reduce opportunities for direct and verbal interaction in the classroom (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021). Therefore, it is important for lecturers to use technology wisely and ensure that its use supports learning objectives and active student participation. In this way, technology can be an effective tool to reduce silent behavior and enhance student engagement in English language learning.

The findings of this study conclude that silent behavior in the classroom among adult EFL learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta is influenced by various complex and interrelated factors. Communication anxiety, lack of confidence, teaching methods, classroom environment, and cultural factors all contribute to silent behavior. To address this issue, a holistic and inclusive approach is needed, considering psychological, pedagogical, and cultural aspects. Lecturers need to create a

supportive learning environment and use interactive and participatory teaching methods. Approaches that emphasize collaborative learning and positive learning experiences can help reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence. Additionally, understanding and respecting students' cultural norms is crucial to creating an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere. This way, a more dynamic, inclusive learning environment can be created, supporting the optimal development of English language skills among adult learners at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta.

For practical implementation, lecturers can start by identifying students who tend to remain silent and provide special attention to encourage their participation. Providing positive feedback, creating opportunities to speak in small groups, and using teaching techniques that actively involve students can be effective initial steps. Additionally, organizing training and workshops for lecturers on inclusive and interactive teaching strategies can help create a more supportive classroom environment for all students. With the right approach, silent behavior in the classroom can be minimized, and students' verbal participation can be increased, making the English learning process more effective and meaningful.

3.2. The Impact Of Silent Behavior On The Learning Process

Silent behavior in the classroom is a phenomenon that can significantly impact the learning process. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, silent behavior not only affects the individual concerned but also impacts classroom dynamics and overall learning outcomes. Research conducted at Ahmad Dahlan University in Yogyakarta reveals various negative impacts of silent behavior, both on the students themselves and on the classroom learning process. The following are the in-depth impacts:

a. Hindrance to Language Skill Development

Silent behavior in the classroom directly hinders the development of students' English language skills. Speaking and interacting in the target language are essential components of language learning. When students choose to remain silent, they miss valuable opportunities to practice and improve their speaking abilities. Classroom verbal interaction allows students to practice grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary in real contexts, as well as receive immediate feedback from lecturers and classmates. Without active participation, students cannot effectively hone these skills, which in turn hinders their progress in mastering English. Silent behavior also reduces the opportunity to build confidence in speaking English. Confidence is a crucial factor in language learning because confident students are more likely to take risks and actively participate in class activities. When students consistently avoid speaking, their confidence does not develop, and their anxiety may increase. Research by Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi (2022) shows that foreign language anxiety can be a significant barrier to language learning, and silent behavior often manifests this anxiety.

b. Impact on Classroom Interaction

Silent behavior also affects classroom dynamics and interaction. An ideal classroom is one that is full of active interaction between students and lecturers, as well as among students. This interaction allows for the exchange of ideas, discussions, and collaboration, all of which contribute to deeper and more meaningful learning. When many students choose to remain silent, this interaction becomes limited, and the classroom atmosphere becomes passive. This can make the class less engaging and dynamic, ultimately affecting other students' motivation to learn. The lack of verbal interaction can also impact the quality of teaching. Lecturers may struggle to assess students' understanding of the material if students do not participate in discussions or ask questions. This can hinder the lecturer's ability to adjust teaching methods and provide the necessary assistance. In the long run, the lack of feedback from students can make lecturers feel frustrated and less effective in their teaching. A study by Ahsan (2021) indicates that effective interaction in EFL classrooms is crucial for language learning success, and the lack of student participation can be a significant barrier to this process.

c. Impact on Academic Achievement

Silent behavior in the classroom also has a direct impact on students' academic achievement. Students who do not actively participate in class tend to have lower grades in speaking assessments and activities involving verbal interaction. This is due to the lack of practice and opportunities to receive feedback, which are essential for improvement and

mastery of language skills. Silent behavior can also affect students' performance in other aspects of language learning, such as listening, reading, and writing, as these skills are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Research by Ahmetović et al. (2020) shows that foreign language speaking anxiety can affect overall academic performance. Students who experience high anxiety tend to have lower academic achievement because they do not actively participate in class activities that are crucial for learning. Additionally, silent behavior can affect students' attitudes towards learning English overall. Students who feel unable or afraid to speak may lose interest and motivation to learn, which ultimately negatively impacts their academic achievement.

d. Psychological and Emotional Impact

Silent behavior in the classroom can also have significant psychological and emotional impacts on students. Students who consistently feel anxious and lack confidence may experience stress, frustration, and despair. These feelings can affect their mental well-being and reduce their overall quality of life. Additionally, students who feel unable to participate in class may feel isolated and less connected with their classmates, which can affect their social relationships inside and outside the classroom. Research by Li et al. (2021) shows that foreign language anxiety can affect other aspects of students' lives, including emotional and social well-being. Students who experience high anxiety tend to have higher levels of stress and lower life satisfaction. Therefore, it is important for lecturers and educational institutions to understand the psychological impact of silent behavior and take steps to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. This way, students can feel safer and more motivated to participate actively in learning.

e. Impact on Critical Thinking Skills

Active participation in class discussions is a crucial component in the development of critical thinking skills. When students engage in discussions, they are encouraged to think deeply about the topics discussed, analyze information, and develop their own arguments. This process not only helps them understand the material better but also develops critical thinking skills essential for academic and professional success. However, silent behavior in the classroom prevents students from this experience, which ultimately hinders the development of their critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are highly valued in higher education and professional life. The ability to analyze information, make appropriate decisions, and develop creative solutions to problems are skills highly appreciated in many fields. Therefore, silent behavior in the classroom can have long-term impacts on students' readiness to face future challenges. Research by Kim et al. (2020) indicates that active engagement in learning is key to developing critical thinking skills, and the lack of participation can significantly hinder this process.

f. Impact on Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is an effective approach in language education, where students work together to achieve common learning goals. In this context, verbal interaction and cooperation among students are crucial for successful learning. However, silent behavior in the classroom can hinder collaborative learning because students who do not actively participate cannot make meaningful contributions to their group. This not only affects individual performance but also the overall performance of the group. Collaborative learning also helps students develop important social and interpersonal skills, such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. When students are reluctant to speak or participate in group activities, they miss the opportunity to develop these skills. Additionally, silent behavior can lead to an imbalance in group contributions, where some students have to take on greater responsibility to complete tasks. This can cause tension and conflict within the group, which ultimately can hinder the effectiveness of collaborative learning.

The impact of silent behavior on the learning process has important implications for teaching and educational policy. Lecturers need to recognize the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where all students feel safe and motivated to participate actively. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as using interactive teaching methods, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging collaboration among students. Additionally, lecturers need to be sensitive to signs of anxiety and lack of confidence in students and provide the necessary support

to help them overcome these barriers. Educational institutions also need to consider policies and programs that can support the development of students' language skills and reduce speaking anxiety. Training programs for lecturers on inclusive and interactive teaching strategies can help create a more supportive classroom environment. Moreover, psychological support and counseling programs for students experiencing language anxiety can provide the necessary assistance to address this issue. With a comprehensive and inclusive approach, educational institutions can help reduce silent behavior in the classroom and enhance the quality of English language learning for all students.

Silent behavior in the classroom has significant impacts on the learning process, both individually and collectively. These impacts include hindering the development of language skills, negatively affecting classroom interaction, lower academic achievement, psychological and emotional impacts, and hindering the development of critical thinking skills and collaborative learning. Therefore, it is crucial for lecturers and educational institutions to understand and address the factors that cause silent behavior in the classroom and create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. By doing so, a more effective, dynamic, and meaningful learning process can be created for all students, especially in the context of learning English as a foreign language.

4. Conclusion

This research has revealed various factors influencing silent behavior in EFL adult learners at Ahmad Dahlan University, Yogyakarta, as well as the negative impacts on the learning process. Communication anxiety, lack of confidence, less interactive teaching methods, an unsupportive classroom environment, and cultural factors are some of the main causes of this phenomenon. Silent behavior in the classroom not only hinders the development of students' English language skills but also negatively affects classroom interaction, academic achievement, and students' psychological well-being. To address this issue, a holistic and inclusive approach is needed, considering various aspects that influence silent behavior in the classroom. Lecturers need to create a supportive learning environment, use interactive teaching methods, and provide the necessary support to reduce anxiety and boost students' confidence. Additionally, educational institutions should adopt policies and programs that can support the development of students' language skills and address speaking anxiety. By understanding the factors influencing silent behavior and its impacts, and adopting effective strategies to address this issue, it is hoped that the English learning process at Ahmad Dahlan University, Yogyakarta, can become more effective, dynamic, and inclusive. Through the collective efforts of lecturers, students, and educational institutions, it is expected to create a learning environment that optimally supports the development of English language skills for all students, enabling them to reach their full academic and professional potential.

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