

## **Understanding Students' Silence in the EFL Classroom**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In classroom activities, a common approach among teachers is to give students time to think and respond. However, this time may extend into uncomfortable prolonged silence when the students seem unwilling to respond at all. In understanding the phenomenon of silence, culture and context are often referred to as a starting point. Yet, Armstrong (2007) believes that 'it is not merely a question of cultural difference and diversity, but an understanding of the classroom processes and interactions that contribute to the active construction of the meanings of silence in its classroom context' (p.5). This presentation addresses pedagogical issues surrounding silence in the language classroom and builds on the findings of my ongoing PhD research which suggests the impact of classroom culture, teachers' behaviour, and course content on students' interpretations and use of silence in the English language classroom. When students choose to remain silent, this behaviour is often interpreted as a threat towards "active" learning and language development. Students are often expected to demonstrate their engagement in class through overt participation, typically via spoken output. The primary findings of my research show that students altered different interpretations to their silence based on a number of congruent factors which unexpectedly focused heavily on the environment of learning and mainly power relations in classroom.

**Keywords:** silence; classroom; ELT; interaction; speaking