

**Problems, Influencing Factors, and Coping Strategies in English Speaking of Silent
Students at Private University in *Malang***

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Tari, Imelda Febriana, 2025. **Problems, Influencing Factors, and Coping Strategies in English Speaking of Silent Students at Private University in Malang.** Thesis, Magister English Education Department, Post-Graduate Program, Universitas Islam Malang, Advisor: (1) Dr. Imam Wahyudi Karimullah, SS., M.A. (2) Dr. Dra. Mutmainnah Mustofa, M.Pd.

Keywords: *Speaking Problems, Internal and External factors, Coping Strategies, EFL Learners*

The aim of this research was to investigate the speaking problems faced by EFL students, to identify the internal and external factors influencing their speaking performance, and to explore the coping strategies they employed to overcome those challenges.

This research applied a qualitative descriptive design. Three quiet students in the fourth to sixth semesters studying at the Islamic University of Malang were selected as participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that were gathered through semi-structured interviews

The findings revealed that students encountered persistent speaking problems such as grammar difficulties, limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, fluency breakdowns, and reliance on translation from Indonesian before speaking. Internal factors including low confidence, fear of mistakes, and anxiety about negative evaluation further hindered their performance. External factors such as teacher feedback style, peer support, classroom atmosphere, and cultural pressure also influenced their willingness to speak. Despite these challenges, students employed multiple coping strategies. Cognitively, they rehearsed mentally, prepared notes, and translated ideas in advance. Behaviourally, they practiced speaking with peers, watched videos, recorded themselves, and wrote journals. Emotionally, they regulated anxiety through positive self-talk, breathing techniques, and visualization of supportive audiences.

In conclusion, the study shows that students' speaking difficulties result from the interplay of linguistic, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. Nevertheless, their use of coping strategies demonstrates resilience and learner autonomy. The study suggests that effective speaking instruction should integrate language competence, psychological support, and culturally sensitive approaches to help learners develop both confidence and fluency in English communication.

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ABSTRAK

Tari, Imelda Febriana, 2025. **Permasalahan, Faktor-Faktor yang Mempengaruhi, dan Strategi Penanggulangan dalam Bahasa Inggris Berbicara pada Mahasiswa Silent di Universitas Swasta Malang.** Tesis, Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Program Pasca Sarjana Universitas Islam Malang, Pembimbing: (1) Dr. Imam Wahyudi Karimullah, SS., M.A. (2) Dr. Dra. Mutmainnah Mustofa, M.Pd.

Kata Kunci: Masalah Berbicara, Faktor Internal dan Eksternal, Strategi Penanggulangan, Pembelajaran EFL

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki masalah berbicara yang dihadapi oleh siswa EFL, untuk mengidentifikasi faktor internal dan eksternal yang memengaruhi kinerja berbicara mereka, dan untuk mengeksplorasi strategi penanggulangan yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut.

Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Tiga mahasiswa pendiam semester empat hingga enam yang sedang menempuh pendidikan di Universitas Islam Malang dipilih sebagai partisipan. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur.

Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa siswa menghadapi masalah berbicara yang terus-menerus seperti kesulitan tata bahasa, kosakata terbatas, kesalahan pengucapan, gangguan kelancaran, dan ketergantungan pada terjemahan dari bahasa Indonesia sebelum berbicara. Pembelajaran EFL V Faktor internal, termasuk rendahnya rasa percaya diri, rasa takut akan kesalahan, dan kecemasan akan evaluasi negatif, semakin menghambat kinerja mereka. Faktor eksternal, seperti gaya umpan balik guru, dukungan teman sebaya, suasana kelas, dan tekanan budaya, juga memengaruhi kemauan mereka untuk berbicara. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan-tantangan ini, para siswa menerapkan berbagai strategi koping. Secara kognitif, mereka berlatih secara mental, menyiapkan catatan, dan menerjemahkan ide-ide sebelumnya. Secara perilaku, mereka berlatih berbicara dengan teman sebaya, menonton video, merekam diri mereka sendiri, dan menulis jurnal.

Secara emosional, mereka mengatur kecemasan melalui pembicaraan positif dengan diri sendiri, teknik pernapasan, dan visualisasi audiens yang mendukung.

Kesimpulannya, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan berbicara siswa merupakan hasil interaksi faktor linguistik, psikologis, dan sosial budaya. Meskipun demikian, penggunaan strategi koping mereka menunjukkan ketahanan dan kemandirian belajar. Studi ini menyarankan bahwa pengajaran berbicara yang efektif harus mengintegrasikan kompetensi bahasa, dukungan psikologis, dan pendekatan yang peka budaya untuk membantu siswa mengembangkan kepercayaan diri dan kelancaran dalam berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background and rationale of the study, the identification of problems, research questions, objectives, and the significance of the research. It serves as the foundation for understanding why the study was conducted and how it contributes to the field of English language learning. By outlining the scope and focus, this chapter provides a clear direction for the subsequent chapters.

A. Background of the Research

Speaking is one of the most essential productive skills in English language learning, particularly for university students who are expected to express ideas, arguments, and opinions clearly in both academic and non-academic contexts. Despite the implementation of communicative approaches in English Education programs, many learners still struggle with speaking confidence and fluency. A recurring issue found in Indonesian EFL classrooms is the presence of *silent students* learners who rarely participate verbally despite having adequate English proficiency. Silent students do not remain quiet because of a lack of linguistic knowledge, but rather because of intertwined psychological, social, and cultural factors. King (2013) describes silent learners as those who avoid verbal participation even when they understand the material, while Bao (2020) highlights

that silence can emerge from affective barriers such as anxiety, fear of mistakes, and overthinking. These issues are also evident in EFL classrooms in Indonesia.

Speaking is considered one of the most essential productive skills in English language learning, especially in today's globalized era. As the academic and professional demands grow higher, students are expected not only to understand information passively but also to express ideas, arguments, and thoughts actively and communicatively. In higher education, speaking proficiency is not merely an indicator of language mastery, but also a reflection of students' ability to adapt, think critically, and build social relationships (Richards, 2015). Despite the implementation of various communicative teaching methods in English language curricula, many students still face significant difficulties in developing their speaking skills. This issue becomes particularly concerning among sixth-semester university students, who, in theory, have already completed several speaking-related courses and are expected to be more confident and fluent in academic and non-academic oral communication (Tuan & Mai, 2015). However, despite the integration of various communicative and student-centered approaches in the English curriculum, many students at Universitas Islam Malang still struggle to express themselves fluently and confidently in speaking classes. Classroom observations and informal discussions with lecturers indicate that a number of students, particularly those categorized as a *silent students*, tend to avoid oral participation. They often remain quiet during group discussions, hesitate to respond when asked, or simply nod rather than speak, even when they understand the topic. This reluctance is not necessarily due to a lack of linguistic competence, but rather stems from psychological and social factors such as fear of making mistakes, low

self-confidence, and anxiety about being judged by peers or teachers. These issues reflect a real and persistent problem in the teaching and learning process at University in *Malang*, suggesting the need for deeper investigation into the internal and external factors that contribute to students' silence and speaking difficulties.

A notable group among these learners is what scholars and educators often refer to as silent students. According to King (2013) and Bao (2020), silent students are those who exhibit limited verbal participation and prefer to remain quiet even when they understand the lesson content. Their silence may reflect cultural norms, affective barriers, or classroom dynamics rather than a lack of ability. This concept provides the theoretical basis for the current study in examining the phenomenon of student reticence in EFL classrooms. These are students who remain quiet during the learning process, rarely participate in classroom discussions, and even avoid speaking-related activities. This phenomenon is complex and multidimensional, involving psychological, social, pedagogical, and cultural aspects. As Liu and Jackson (2020) explain, *“English learners often experience language anxiety that interferes with their willingness to speak, even when they possess adequate language knowledge.”* Internal factors such as low self-confidence, speaking anxiety, introverted personality traits, or previous negative experiences are often identified as major contributors. Externally, peer pressure, teacher expectations, and a lack of supportive classroom environments can worsen these conditions (Yashima, 2018). Students may fear being negatively evaluated by others, which significantly increases their reluctance to speak. As Horwitz et al. (2019) noted, *“fear of negative evaluation is one of the most common sources of language anxiety among university students.”* At University in *Malang*, where producing globally

competent graduates is part of its mission, the ability to speak English fluently is a vital component of student success. Therefore, the presence of silent students, especially among sixth-semester students, raises serious concerns about the effectiveness of current teaching approaches and whether they adequately address the emotional and psychological needs of all learners. It is likely that performance-focused methods unintentionally overlook the hidden struggles of these students. They may feel isolated, misunderstood, or unsafe in attempting to speak up and make mistakes.

Furthermore, the presence of silent students does not only affect individual academic performance but also influences overall classroom dynamics. Teachers may wrongly interpret silence as a lack of motivation or capability, when in fact these students are experiencing hidden emotional and cognitive barriers (Kim, 2022). When their emotional and psychological needs are not fully understood, the interventions offered often fail to address the root causes of their silence. Given this reality, it is crucial to conduct an in-depth study of the problems encountered by silent students in developing their English-speaking skills. This research focuses on three main objectives: (1) identifying the core problems that hinder silent students from speaking, (2) exploring both internal and external factors that influence their behaviour, and (3) examining the coping strategies these students adopt, consciously or unconsciously, to manage their challenges. By uncovering the lived experiences and voices of these silent students, this study aims to generate insightful findings that can inform the development of more inclusive, empathetic, and learner-centred English teaching practices. Ultimately, this research contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of English language learning but also offers

practical implications for teachers, lecturers, and educational institutions to create learning environments that accommodate diverse learner personalities. After all, success in mastering English speaking skills is not solely determined by how much a student talks, but by how ready and comfortable they feel to do so.

B. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What speaking problems are experienced by silent students in the English Education Department at Private University in Malang?
2. How do internal and external factors influence their speaking performance, and what coping strategies do silent students employ to deal with these challenges?

C. Objectives of the Research

The purpose of the research is:

1. To identify the speaking problems are experienced by silent students in the English Education Department at University in Malang.
2. To investigate about how internal and external factors influence their speaking performance, and what coping strategies do silent students employ to deal with these challenges.

D. Significance of the Research

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance:

- 1) Theoretical Significance

The study's findings are intended to contribute to the current literature in the field of English language instruction, particularly in terms of comprehending the obstacles that silent students confront when developing

speaking abilities. The study also seeks to contribute to the academic discussion on language anxiety, learner personality, and student engagement in second language learning.

2) Practical Significance

a. For Teachers and Lecturers

This study can offer valuable insights into how to identify and support silent students in the classroom, by adopting more inclusive and empathetic teaching approaches that promote a safe and encouraging learning environment.

b. For Silent Students

The study can help silent students become more aware of their own challenges, encouraging them to explore coping strategies that may improve their confidence and participation in speaking activities.

E. Scope and Limitation

This research focuses specifically on three silent students in the English Education Department at a university in Malang. All three participants FB, RH, and FR are introverted learners with strong English proficiency, but they differ in their academic experiences. FB, in particular, has demonstrated exceptional English skills, enabling him to join a student exchange program in Taiwan. RH is also introverted and academically strong. He performs well in English but avoids speaking in class because he fears mistakes and negative evaluation. Despite good competence, he rarely volunteers answers, preferring to stay silent. And FR displays similar characteristics: introverted, linguistically capable, but anxious about attention. FR excels in grammar and reading but struggles to speak spontaneously because of overthinking and fear of judgment. Their profiles illustrate that silent

students are not weak academically; instead, they are competent yet psychologically constrained.

Based on these issues, this study focuses on their speaking problems, the factors influencing their speaking performance, and the coping strategies they use to manage such difficulties. Although academically capable, these students consistently exhibit limited verbal participation in class due to internal factors such as introversion, speaking anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation..

The study is limited to:

- a) **Silent students who are academically capable**, especially those who have completed core speaking courses but still demonstrate minimal oral participation.
- b) **Speaking performance within classroom settings**, excluding informal communication outside academic activities.
- c) **Data collected only through interviews**, which limits the scope to students' self-reported experiences and may not capture every aspect of their psychological processes.

By narrowing the scope to academically strong yet silent students, the study provides a deeper understanding of how personal tendencies such as introversion interact with linguistic and environmental factors to shape speaking behaviour.

F. Definition of Key Terms

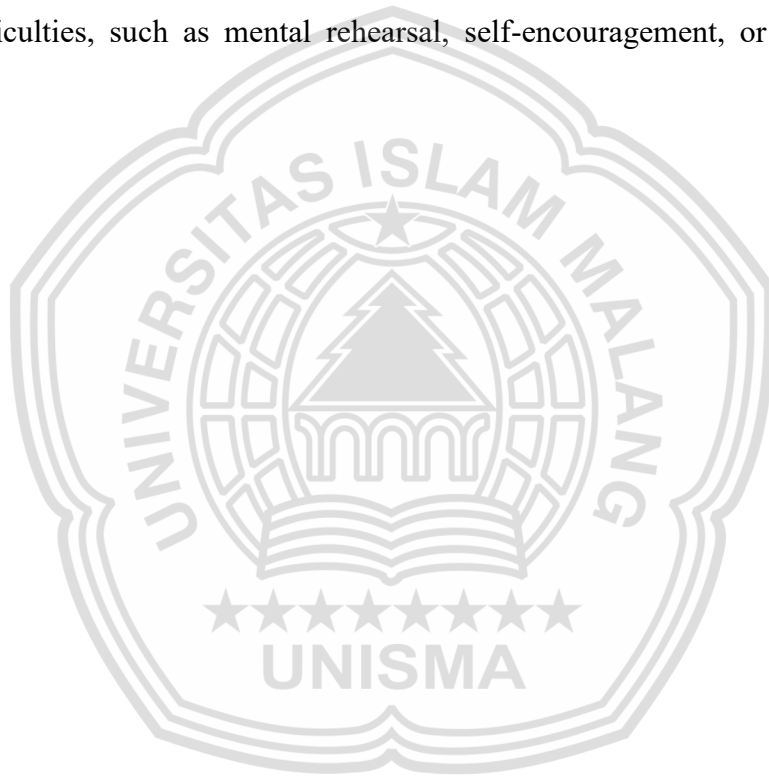
To avoid ambiguity and ensure clarity in understanding, the following key terms are defined as they are used in this study.

Silent Students, Learners who are academically capable but tend to remain quiet and minimally participate in speaking activities due to anxiety, introversion, or fear of negative evaluation.

Speaking Problems, Difficulties experienced when expressing ideas orally, including issues with pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, or psychological barriers such as anxiety and low confidence.

Influencing Factors, Internal aspects (e.g., anxiety, motivation, self-belief) and external aspects (e.g., peers, classroom climate, teacher's style) that shape students' speaking performance.

Coping Strategies, Efforts or techniques used by students to overcome speaking difficulties, such as mental rehearsal, self-encouragement, or seeking support.



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter IV by comparing them with theories and previous studies reviewed in Chapter II. The discussion aims to interpret the results, identify similarities and differences with prior research, and highlight new insights offered by this study. By doing so, this chapter seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing students' speaking performance and the coping strategies they employ. The discussion is organized into several subsections that address speaking problems, internal and external influencing factors, and coping strategies, followed by the overall implications of the study.

5.1 Speaking Problems

The findings revealed that the three participants consistently experienced linguistic, psychological, and performance-related problems when speaking English. The most dominant issues were grammar difficulties, limited active vocabulary, pronunciation problems, fluency breakdowns, and the need to translate from Indonesian before speaking. These findings align with Tuan and Mai (2015), who argued that linguistic limitations significantly hinder university students' oral communication.

Participants FB, RH, and FR admitted that even though they had learned English for years, they were still unable to produce spontaneous sentences due to the lack of automaticity. This supports Thornbury's (2017) theory that fluency requires rapid retrieval of language, which silent students often struggle to achieve.

Their hesitation, long pauses, and disrupted speech demonstrate that linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient without frequent practice.

Psychological problems were also highly evident. All participants reported fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and nervousness when speaking, especially in spontaneous situations. These findings confirm Horwitz et al. (2019), who stated that fear of negative evaluation is one of the strongest predictors of speaking anxiety among university students.

Interestingly, the silent students were not weak academically; in fact, FB is a high-achieving student who joined a student exchange to Taiwan. However, despite his strong competence, he still experienced anxiety and pressure due to high expectations from others. This reinforces Liu and Jackson's (2020) argument that even proficient learners may experience anxiety if they feel socially evaluated.

Finally, cultural reticence also appeared as a speaking problem. Participants feared being labelled "*showing off*" when speaking English actively. Bao's (2020) concept of cultural silence supports this finding, demonstrating that Indonesian EFL learners often remain quite due to social norms rather than a lack of ability.

Overall, these problems illustrate that the speaking challenges faced by silent students stem from interconnected linguistic, affective, and socio-cultural factors rather than low proficiency alone.

5.2 Internal Influencing Factors

Internal factors influencing students' speaking performance include anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation.

Anxiety

All participants reported experiencing nervousness, trembling voices, and fear of being judged. This aligns with Horwitz (2016), who described language

anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety triggered in classroom speaking tasks. The participants' anxiety often resulted in avoidance and silence, confirming Dewaele and Li's (2016) findings that anxious learners struggle to maintain fluency despite having adequate knowledge.

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence was highly unstable among silent students. They were confident only when well-prepared or familiar with the topic but became passive during spontaneous speaking tasks. This supports Dewaele and Pavelescu (2021), who found that positive emotions enhance fluency, whereas fear and shame suppress oral performance.

Motivation

Although the participants were motivated to improve their English, their motivation fluctuated depending on classroom atmosphere and task difficulty. Silent students tended to withdraw when they felt their performance would be evaluated publicly. This is consistent with Rahmati et al. (2023), who noted that motivation interacts with emotions to influence learners' willingness to communicate.

Overall, internal factors acted as both barriers and triggers that shaped the students' speaking behaviours.

Beyond linguistic barriers, internal factors significantly affect students' speaking performance. The participants in this study expressed low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety about being negatively judged. Interestingly, even students with relatively good English proficiency (e.g., FB) admitted to experiencing pressure due to higher expectations from peers and teachers.

These findings are consistent with Dewaele and Li (2020), who argued that fear of negative judgment is a central component of foreign language anxiety. Hidayati and Ratnasari (2021) also demonstrated that Indonesian students often avoid speaking tasks because of embarrassment and fear of criticism. What distinguishes the present study is the evidence that both low-achieving and high-achieving students experience similar anxiety, though triggered by different reasons: proficient learner's fear being exposed, while proficient learners fear failing to meet expectations.

This dual source of anxiety enriches the discussion on *foreign language anxiety* by adding a dimension of peer expectation and self-image. It suggests that interventions should not only target weaker learners but also support higher-level students who may experience hidden pressure due to their perceived ability.

5.3 External Influencing Factors

External factors identified in this study include teacher feedback style, peer support, classroom environment, and cultural norms.

Teacher Feedback Style

Participants became silent when lecturers used a rigid or overly formal teaching style. However, they were more willing to participate when lecturers were interactive and open to student opinions. These findings support Yashima (2018), who argued that teacher behaviour strongly affects students' willingness to communicate.

Peer Influence

Supportive peers increased students' comfort in speaking. However, when surrounded by competitive classmates or those perceived as more fluent, silent students felt pressured and inferior. This finding is consistent with King and Ng

(2022), who found that peer comparison reinforces silence in less confident learners.

Classroom Environment

A formal and performance-focused environment created tension and heightened fear of mistakes. Conversely, a relaxed and collaborative environment fostered greater willingness to speak. This supports Brown's (2007) perspective that a psychologically safe classroom is crucial for speaking performance.

Cultural Norms

Participants feared being judged as arrogant when speaking actively. This perception aligns with Zheng (2017), who described cultural humility as a barrier to learners' oral participation in Asian contexts.

Thus, external factors particularly social and environmental conditions played a significant role in shaping silent students' speaking behaviour.

study also shows that external conditions strongly shape students' speaking experiences. Teacher feedback, peer support, classroom atmosphere, and cultural values all influenced whether students felt encouraged or discouraged to speak. Supportive lecturers who encouraged participation and provided constructive comments created a positive atmosphere, whereas lecturers who corrected errors too harshly or maintained overly formal classroom settings discouraged students from speaking.

These findings are in line with Tran and Baldauf (2020), who emphasized that teachers' feedback style strongly impacts learners' willingness to communicate. Wijaya (2022) also highlighted the role of peer support in fostering speaking opportunities. Additionally, cultural pressure was a recurring theme in this study.

Consistent with Zheng and Cheng (2021), who examined East Asian learners, students in this study reported being reluctant to stand out for fear of being perceived as arrogant or “showing off.”

Thus, this research confirms that cultural context cannot be ignored in discussing EFL speaking. In Indonesia, where humility and conformity are valued, students may avoid active participation to maintain social harmony. This highlights the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies that balance encouragement with sensitivity to social norms.

5.4 Coping Strategies

5.4.1 Cognitive Strategies

Students employed mental rehearsal, note-taking, and translating ideas in advance as ways to prepare for speaking tasks. These strategies are consistent with Oxford’s (2019) taxonomy of language learning strategies and have been proven effective in reducing cognitive load during communication. Susanto (2022) found similar results, showing that prior rehearsal significantly improves students’ speaking performance by reducing hesitation.

The present study reinforces these findings but also adds nuance: preparation was not only a way to reduce anxiety but also a mechanism for students to gain a sense of control over unpredictable speaking situations. This suggests that cognitive strategies serve both linguistic and psychological functions.

5.4.2 Behavioural Strategies

In terms of behaviour, participants reported practicing at home, watching videos in English, imitating native speakers, recording themselves, and even journaling in English. These strategies mirror the findings of Fitriani (2021), who reported that YouTube and films are widely used by Indonesian learners to improve speaking. Similarly, Putri and Setyawan (2023) found that recording and peer practice help learners monitor progress and refine pronunciation.

What makes the current study distinct is that it shows students' willingness to engage in self-directed learning outside the classroom. This demonstrates learner autonomy, as students actively design their own informal speaking practices beyond the formal curriculum.

5.4.3 Emotional Regulation Strategies

Managing emotions was also a key theme. Participants reported using positive self-talk, breathing exercises, and imagining supportive audiences as coping mechanisms. These results align with Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019), who found that positive emotional regulation strategies increased learners' willingness to speak. Similarly, Pratiwi (2023) confirmed that affirmations and relaxation techniques helped Indonesian learners reduce speaking anxiety.

This study extends those findings by showing that emotional regulation strategies are not simply supplementary but are central to sustaining long-term engagement with speaking. Students who used these techniques consistently were more likely to maintain participation despite anxiety.

Taken together, the findings suggest that speaking difficulties are not merely linguistic in nature but emerge from a complex interplay of language knowledge, psychological states, and socio-cultural environments. Unlike some earlier studies that focused primarily on one dimension such as vocabulary (Nugroho & Rekha, 2020) or anxiety (Hidayati & Ratnasari, 2021) the present research highlights how these factors converge and reinforce one another.

At the same time, students are not passive victims of these challenges. Instead, they actively adopt coping strategies that allow them to navigate linguistic limitations and emotional barriers. This reflects a shift in viewing learners not just as recipients of knowledge but as agents who construct their own learning experiences.

The implications are therefore twofold. First, teachers should adopt a holistic approach to speaking instruction. This means balancing accuracy with fluency, reducing over-correction, and fostering a classroom culture that values effort and communication over perfection. Second, learners should be encouraged to develop coping strategies cognitive, behavioural, and emotional that empower them to regulate anxiety and gain confidence.

The discussion demonstrates that speaking problems among silent students are rooted in a complex interaction of linguistic challenges, affective barriers, social expectations, and cultural influences. Internal factors such as anxiety and low self-confidence interact with external factors such as teacher behaviour and classroom atmosphere to determine their participation. Despite these challenges, silent students actively employ coping strategies that help

them manage their emotions and improve their oral performance. These insights provide valuable implications for teachers and institutions to design learning environments that are more inclusive, empathetic, and supportive of diverse learner personalities.



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