



Research Paper

Investigating the Reasons and Consequences of Students' Silence in the Classroom

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Abstract

Aim: The present study aim was identifying the reasons and consequences of students' silence in the classroom. Therefore, a qualitative approach and an exploratory grounded theory method was used. The research population involved students of the public universities in Tehran who were selected 25 of participants by criterion sampling and theoretical saturation in the findings. Research tool was a semi-structured interview and for the data analysis the content analysis method in three stages, open coding, axial coding and selective coding were used. In order to get assured of the validity of the data, two methods of member-checking and peer -checking were used. The findings showed that the factors and consequences related to student's silence in the classroom can be categorized six factors and consequences, the factors related to the instructor, student and organization, as well as the consequences related to instructor, student and organization.

Keywords: *Student silence, Classroom, Reasons, Consequences*

Introduction

Silence, in one form or another, occurs in all organizations, and universities or classes are no exception. Professors have realized that some students act quite passively in class as they trust professors' explanations, while some other students are not willing to express their ideas, even if professors encourage them to. Students' silence is, therefore, a common phenomenon in many classes (Min, 2016). Although silence is often regarded as students' negative response to the professor (Van Tuyen, 2018), it is sometimes necessary in class. Based on its degree of effectiveness, silence in class can be either positive or negative. Positive silence occurs after the professor poses a question and when students are thinking about its answer. On the other hand, negative silence means that students are not interested in, do not pay attention to, and do not participate in the teaching-learning process (Hayward, 2012; Zhouyuan, 2016). Silence in class, and negative silence in particular, have debilitating impacts on the professor-student interactions and the teaching-learning process (Min, 2016). Previous studies confirm this point and implicate factors such as students' motivation to learn, linguistic skills, personality, materials, teaching methods (Shan, 2020), cultural factors (Wang and Moskal, 2019), shyness, laziness, fear, and lack of awareness (Aripin and Umam 2019) in student's silence. It has been emphasized that negative silence is a barrier to professor-student interactions, disrupts the achievement of learning goals, and harms students' verbal development. The present study, therefore, aimed to identify the reasons and consequences of students' silence in class.

Methodology

This qualitative study used exploratory grounded theory. The study population comprised bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. students in state-run universities of Tehran (Iran). Purposive sampling was adopted to select the participants. The inclusion criteria were having at least one year of lived experience at the university and having experienced silence in class in response to the professor's questions. The data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were continued until reaching theoretical saturation, which was realized with 25 students. The data were analyzed via grounded theory content analysis in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. After transcribing the interviews, the data, categories, and codes were continuously compared in the open coding stage. Then, similar codes and initial categories emerging from open coding were merged in the axial coding stage, and the relationships between sub-categories were determined. Finally, in the selective coding stage, selective categories with new concepts were formed. A total of 253 minor categories, 39

subcategories, and six main categories emerged. Peer check and member check were applied to validate the findings.

Results

Three groups of factors can cause students' silence: professor-related factors (lack of excitement and motivation, bad temper, lack of up-to-date knowledge and information, using educational technologies, and lack of interest in teaching), student-related factors (lack of interest in the discipline, poor knowledge and information background, lack of self-confidence, introversion and isolation, lack of critical thinking, fear of making mistakes, stress and fatigue, lack of commitment and responsibility towards the class, fear of classmates' criticism, feeling that their ideas are not useful), and organizational factors (rigid rules and regulations, centralized orientation, failure to support group participation, the professor being the sole speaker, failure to support discussions and the ensuing conflicts, lack of creativity and innovation, poor class management and time allocation). The consequences of students' silence were also divided into three groups of professor-related (diminished teaching motivation, bad temper and bad behavior towards students, lack of interaction with students, and lack of motivation to use educational technology in teaching), student-related (finding the discipline boring, failing to learn, feeling useless, failure in class assessments, underdeveloped critical thinking, underdeveloped personality factors (e.g., self-confidence), and organizational consequences (job dissatisfaction, occupational stress, anti-organizational behaviors, failure to correctly identify the mistakes and provide solutions, incorrect decision-making, reduced innovation, formation of a wrong organizational culture).

Discussion and conclusion

The first group of factors explaining students' silence in class are professor-related. Professors' bad temper can arouse defense mechanisms such as silence in students. Fear of professors' bad temper urges students to be silent and refrain from participating in class discussions. The professor's lack of interest in teaching and lack of motivation stop them from acquiring up-to-date information in their specialty or becoming familiarized with novel educational methods and tools, which will make the class boring for the students and eventually make them silent. The second group of reasons is student-related. Some personality traits such as poor self-confidence and shyness stop students from participating in class discussions. Fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation by friends and professors, and being criticized are also the reasons for students' preference of silence to participation and

interaction in class. The absence of analytic skills, superficial and outdated information and knowledge also make students keep silent as they have nothing to say. Increasing students' information and knowledge will improve their self-confidence and prepare them for participation in the teaching process and class discussions; therefore, the absence of specialized and up-to-date information and knowledge about the discipline can explain why students are silent in class. The third group of reasons deals with the organization (university). In the absence of a spirit of participation in other activities and sectors of the university, students and professors cannot be expected to interact and participate in class. When classroom discussions lead to a solution but the solution is not accepted or supported by the university, students and professors will be bored and demotivated. As such, students as the key stakeholders of the teaching-learning process prefer to keep silent and refrain from participation.

Students' silence has consequences for the professor, students, and the organization. To resolve or mitigate students' silence and increase their participation in class, courses for social behaviors, verbal communication skills, and critical thinking about the learned material should be held for students. Students can also treat some of their personality traits, including shyness and introversion, and improve their interpersonal and social skills by visiting counseling centers. If professors use novel teaching methods and educational technology, they can also encourage students to participate in class. Finally, providing a more flexible organizational structure and allowing academic freedom in class management will promote dynamism in the educational setting, including classrooms.

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