

Breaking Students' Silence through Games in Speaking Classroom

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1. INTRODUCTION

In EFL speaking classroom, many teachers face the same problems about their students' performance. They confess how passive the students are, not only in discussion activity but also in question-answer session. There are only a few students willing to speak, while the majority stay quiet and avoid eye contact. When they are assigned to perform a dialog in front of the class many of them hesitated to speak even though the script is already prepared. Some students speak very softly, while others refused to perform because they were afraid of mispronouncing the English words. This condition can hinder the communicative interaction that is the primary goal of learning language which mainly focus on speaking skill (Islamiah & Hasbi, 2024).

The above phenomenon is known as students' silence, a condition where students choose to remain silent or show little verbal participation during English speaking activities (Setiyono et al., 2026). Although some argue that students' silence does not always mean negative attitude of the students because it is viewed as cognitive process in learning, but inability of the students in expressing opinion or answer questions can be seen as a failure to achieve the communicative goal of language learning.

According to Purwanti & Yeni (2021), students' silence in the classroom is influenced by three major factors: psychological, linguistic, and socio-cultural factors. Psychological factors are associated with students' low motivation, limited self-confidence, shyness, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes during speaking activities. Linguistic factors, on the other hand, involve inadequate vocabulary mastery, difficulties in constructing grammatically accurate sentences, and poor pronunciation skills. Meanwhile, socio-cultural factors are closely related to the roles of teachers and classroom conditions. Students require a supportive and comfortable learning environment that can foster active participation and reduce their reluctance to speak.

In line with this perspective, a study conducted by Hanifaturrizkia et al., (2025) found that less interactive methods also contribute significantly to students' silence. Therefore, teachers are needed to design instructional strategies that only not support language development but also create an enjoyable and interactive learning atmosphere (Hasbi et al., 2026). One of strategies widely considered affective is the use of games in speaking activities. As stated by Gunawan (2025), games can enhance students' motivation, lower anxiety, promote more relaxed classroom interaction, and increase students' confidence in speaking English.

2. DISCUSSION

The games implemented in teaching-learning activities must be appropriate and able to address the factors related to barriers to communication. However, the effectiveness of games is strongly influenced by teachers' roles in selecting, implementing, and managing game-based activities in the classroom.

2.1 Games as a Strategy to Break Students' Silence

Whisper Chain

Whisper Chain is effective to teach speaking (Muammamah & Zuhriyah, 2024). It reduces anxiety, shyness, and the fear of

making mistakes when speaking. In this game, students speak casually in small groups, reducing the pressure of speaking in front of the class. This game is suitable for students who are passive due to lack of confidence or fear of being ridiculed by their peers. Here are the stages:

- The students are divided into groups of 5-6 people.
- Several short sentences are prepared based on the material (e.g. describing people, daily activities, etc).
- The first student reads the sentence silently.
- Then, he/she whispers the sentence to the second student.
- The message is passed down to the last student.
- The last students say the sentence aloud.
- The teacher and students compare the final results with the original sentences.
- The group with the most accurate message wins.

Information Gap Game

The information Gap Game helps students who are reluctant due to limited vocabulary, grammar, or difficulty constructing sentences. In this game, students must exchange information to complete the task, encouraging them to use English naturally. The stages are as follows:

- The students are grouped into pairs.
- Each student receives a different information sheet.
- Student A has information that student B does not have.
- Student B has information that student A does not have.
- Students must ask and answer questions in English to fill the missing information.
- The teacher provides examples of questions that can be used.
- After completion, pairs briefly present their results.

Board Games

Board games can be used to address students' silence caused by pedagogical factors, such as monotonous teaching methods (Aminah & Shofiyuddin, 2025), lack of classroom interaction, and

overly teacher-centered learning. These games encourage students to be more active because they learn while playing and discussing with their peers. The classroom atmosphere becomes more communicative and collaborative. The stages include:

- The teacher prepares a board game and the language target.
- The teacher introduces the topic and useful vocabulary or expressions (e.g. expressions of asking for and giving opinion).
- The teacher explains the rules.
- The students are divided into small groups (3-5 students).
- The students play the board by rolling the dice, moving token, answering questions (giving opinion on a certain statement).
- The teacher closes activity by providing feedback.

2.2 The Roles of Teachers in Implementing Games

As a Communication Facilitator

In implementing games, teachers act as communication facilitators, helping students use English actively throughout the activities. They are not the center of learning, but rather provide opportunities for students to speak, discuss, and interact with their peers. As facilitators, teachers responsible for providing clear instructions, managing the game, and assisting students with any difficulties with vocabulary or sentence structure. They also provide positive feedback during and after the game.

As a Game Selector

Selecting the right games is a crucial factor in successful speaking lessons. Teachers must consider the learning objectives, students' ability levels, the material being studied, and available time before deciding which games to use. Furthermore, teachers need to ensure that games are not only entertaining but also educational. The games chosen should encourage students to speak actively and use English in meaningful context.

As an Interaction Builder

Games can help teachers build more flexible and supportive learning interactions. In a playful atmosphere, the relationship between teacher and students become more relaxed, making students feel more comfortable speaking English. Teachers provide support to all students. Those who lack confidence should be given motivation and opportunities to participate in games. A supportive learning condition will promote students to be more confident in trying to use English without fear of making mistakes.

As a Topic Creator

To make speaking activities more effective, teachers need to create interesting and relevant topics for discussion. Topics that relate to everyday experiences will make it easier for students to understand the material and be more motivated to speak. Teachers can choose topics such as hobbies, school, social media, dreams, or personal experiences as material for speaking games. Using real-life situations in games can also help students understand the use of English in everyday life.

3. RECOMMENDATION

The tendency for students to remain silent in English Class can no longer be viewed simply as a lack of participation, but rather as a complex manifestation of psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical challenges that are not yet fully capable of creating a comfortable space for students. This problem needs more attention because it can hinder the development of communication skills which should be the main purpose of language learning (Maher & King, 2022).

Amid these challenges, the use of games has emerged as an innovative approach that not only break students' silence but also fosters a more active, enjoyable, and collaborative learning environment. Through games-based activities, students tend to be more willing to participate, making the classroom atmosphere more interactive and less stressful (Astawa et al., 2026; Hasbi et

al., 2024). However, the successful implementation of games in learning is inseparable from the teacher's role as a facilitator, determining how these activities are designed, directed, and utilized to encourage students to participate verbally (Mellany, 2021).

Author



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