

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

English is vital to face the rapid global economic and technological development and get people ready to compete in the globalization era. Being able to communicate effectively in this globalization era requires mastery of the English language (Christinawati & Ganesha, 2019). While the English language has been viewed as a cultural imperialism, it can be contextualized to the local context to lead people to the global competitiveness (Pujasari & Hikmatullah, 2023). Learning to speak English fluently sometimes requires non-native English speakers to focus on conversational skills, not only on grammar, and vocabulary. English conversational activities are essential for improving language learning (Koçlü, 2018) because they allow the students to practice their language skills in authentic contexts. Therefore, English conversational skills need to be trained to encourage the ability to communicate.

The importance of English conversational skills has led to the spread of English language courses. These courses offered conversational classes with various methods but for a similar goal, which is to improve students' ability to engage in meaningful conversations in English (Masoumi-Moghaddam, 2018; Shafira & Santoso, 2021). While these courses aim to create an environment conducive to learning, the extent to which students actively engage in English conversational practices can significantly impact their language acquisition and educational experience. According to Oga-Baldwin (2019), there are four types of engagement in foreign language learning, namely: behavior, emotion, cognition, and agency. The main focus of this study is behavioral engagement.

The term behavioral engagement in the context of this study refers to the students' behaviors and participation in English conversational practices in an English course. Behavioral engagement of students is vital during the learning process as it directly contributes to getting a successful academic result (Davis et al., 2012; Lei et al., 2018; Reschly et al., 2020). According to Oga-Baldwin (2019), students' behavioral engagement in foreign language learning is the most visible

that can be observed, it involves body language such as gaze, nod, or raising a hand. On the other hand, Davis et al. (2012) stated that behavioral engagement in the learning process is not only about body language, but also includes the students' effort, persistence, participation, and compliance with the teacher or instructor. It is shown by paying attention, speaking confidently, participating in group discussion, and following the rules.

The present study investigates the students' behavioral engagement in conversational class in an English course. The conversational class was offered in an English course in Garut, West Java, Indonesia. This course offers various classes, including general English class, conversational class, TOEFL preparation class, and ESP class. Students who joined the courses are middle school students, high school students, and college students. However, the researcher chose behavioral engagement as the focus of the study since it is observable by the researcher as the external part of the course. Based on a pre-interview with a tutor who teaches in that course, most students join in both general English and conversational classes. The tutor said that students showed different behaviors in the general English and the conversational class. Since conversational class requires students to practice their speaking ability to communicate, the students are being talkative in this class. The tutor also stated that in the conversational class, the students are more active and showed their interest by raising their hands to ask or answer questions. Even if they could not express themselves verbally, they used body language to do so.

Previous studies have explored students' behavioral engagement in ELT contexts. Afendi et al. (2020) interviewed teachers and students in the faculty of agriculture at a university. The study found that teachers use four types of scaffolding talk to stimulate and facilitate students' behavioral engagement in ESP classrooms. Dewaele and Li (2021) conducted a study in Chinese EFL classes and found that teacher enthusiasm affects students' enjoyment, boredom, and social-behavioral engagement in L2 classrooms. Another relevant study was conducted by Saeli and Cheng (2021) interviewed students and teachers in TOEFL iBT classes

and revealed that peer feedback improves students' writing quality and students' engagement affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively.

Although previous studies have focused on exploring behavioral engagement in various educational settings (e.g. TOEFL preparation classes, and ESP classes in universities), scarce studies have emphasized the issue of students' behavioral engagement in an English conversational class. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating students' behavioral engagement amid English conversational practices in an English language course.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

The present study addresses this research question “How do the students engage behaviorally amid English conversational practices in an English course?”.

1.3 Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding, the researcher presents definitions of some terms related to the study

1.3.1 Behavioral Engagement Students' behavioral engagement is the behaviors or participation shown by the students to be involved in the learning process. This can be seen through students' effort, persistence, participation and compliance.

1.3.2 English Conversational Practices English conversational practices are the variety of verbal and non-verbal actions utilized by individuals participating in spoken communication in the English language.

1.3.3 English Course English course is an organized and structured educational institution created to support the acquisition and development of proficiency in the English language.

1.4 Aim of the Study

Related to the research questions, the study aims to investigate and provide evidence of students' behavioral engagement in English conversational practices within a specific English language course.

1.5 Significances of the Study

1.1.1 Theoretical Significance

This study enriches the literature and contributes to the existing theories of engagement in foreign language learning by Oga-Baldwin (2019) and behavioral engagement by Davis et al. (2012).

1.1.2 Practical Significance

This study contributes and can be used as a reference for English language teaching practitioners in school or English courses to engage the EFL students in the classroom, more specifically in conversational activities.

1.1.3 Empirical Significance

This study presents empirical insight for English teaching practitioners about how students show their behavioral engagement in conversational practices.