CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Silence in Learning

Silence plays an important role in the learning process and is often misunderstood. In educational settings, it is more than just the absence of speech —it can be a form of communication, reflection, or even resistance. Understanding silence helps educators and learners recognize its impact on classroom interactions and learning outcomes.

2.1.1.1. Definition of Silence

In general terms, silence is the absence of sound. It refers to the quiet situation or unvoiced environment. According to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), silence is "a state of not speaking or making noise.".. According to Kurzon (1998), silence has at least two meanings; lack of communication or as a communicative activity. Silence is a part of everyday life, but we often fail to notice it. We listen for sound but rarely for silence. Sometimes, we crave silence; other times, it can be uncomfortable (Alerby & Brown, 2021).

Silence can be defined as a permanent or temporary trait. It can be permanent in meaning as a part of an individual's personality or a temporary behavior that arises from shifting circumstances (Bao, 2019). Kurzon (1995) stated that silence is also a form of ignorance. It is a response when the individual does not know the answer to a question. They choose to be silent because they do not want the questioner to discover that they are ignorant. Conversely, with specific goals in mind, such as defiance, disagreement, or consideration, silence can be a valuable communication strategy (Bao, 2019).

2.1.1.2. Functions of Silence

Silence is just as vital as speaking. It is a neutral communicative behaviour that can be evaluated positively and negatively depending on those who interpret it (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985 as cited in Maher, 2021). Silence can serve various functions in communication and classroom setting, both negative and positive.

Negative silence can communicate scorn, hostility, coldness, defiance, sternness, and hate, and can be destructive in shutting down communication, creating barriers, and relaying hostility (Jensen, 1973). Granger (2004, as cited in Hanh, 2020) links silence in the classroom with disobedience, conflict, and misbehaviour and relates students acting as listeners to deception. Thus, it reflects that silence in the classroom is undesirable. Moreover, King (2013, in Maher & King, 2020) believes that silence in a foreign language classroom is a threat due to students' lack of speech participation and verbal response, which threatens effective language learning.

On the other hand, positive silence can communicate respect, thoughtfulness, and politeness (Bahar et al., 2022; Bao, 2020; Nakane, 2007). It can also allow individuals to processing information, negotiating and maintaining social distance, showing impression, and displaying emotion (Nakane, 2007). Moreover, silence is necessity in the classroom. For instance, students require wait time to think and prepare when a teacher poses a question or assigns group tasks (Juniati et al., 2018). Thus, silence is not just the absence of communication, but it is an important communication tool that can be as important as speech in conveying meaning and power, depending on the context in which it is used.

2.1.1.3. Factors Influencing Students' Silence

Silence in the classroom often occurs. It is generally evaluated in terms of classroom participation (Gangavarapu et al., 2022). In EFL classrooms, students' silence is considered a threat due to their lack of participation and verbal response. Furthermore, studies revealed that three main factors contribute to students' silence: language incompetence, psychological issues, and teacher factors.

Students may remain silent because they cannot understand or answer the question. Thus, it indicates inadequate language competency. They cannot answer due to limited vocabulary, ungrammatical expressions, unfamiliar topics, poor pronunciation, and poor proficiency (Hanh, 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2022). Students' limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with the topic make it challenging to comprehend questions and material. Grammar is also considered difficult and scary when learning English (Bahar et al., 2022). Lack of grammar knowledge inhibits students from speaking since students need to arrange their utterances correctly. Moreover, poor pronunciation becomes a barrier for students to communicate (Hanh, 2020). Words written in English are not always similar to how we should pronounce them, complicating students. Hence, students struggle to construct and express their ideas fully in English.

Another significant issue is psychological issues. English is not their first language, so most students do not feel confident enough to communicate in English. Students find it difficult to be confident since they still feel ashamed and avoid participating in class because of their inability, despite the fact that confidence helps them when they want to interact with their friends and teachers (Bahar et al., 2022). Besides, the fear of making mistakes hinders students from orally participating in the classroom. They feared looking ridiculous or unintelligent in front of their peers (Hanh, 2020). The main reason for their fear is negative

reactions from peers and teachers. Such reactions as laughing, hissing, and judging make students fear being exposed for not knowing the answer, thus experiencing public humiliation and shame (Adamson, 2022).

Teachers play an essential role in the teaching-learning process. Teachers' proficiency in explaining materials can become a struggle. Students cannot comprehend the material because the teacher delivers it too complicated. It makes them choose to be silent due to a lack of understanding in the first place. Moreover, unsuitable teaching methods prevent students from participating in the classroom. It may not allow students to participate in the classroom (Nurrohmah & Adi, 2021). The teaching method cannot encourage students to engage in the classroom, resulting in students choosing to be silent since they were not given space to express their ideas. As a result, it can lead to boredom during the learning process. Boredom can arise because of teachers' less attractive ways of teaching and students' lack of understanding of the material (Bahar et al., 2022). It makes students unmotivated and causes them to choose to be silent. They did not understand the lesson or the language, yet they were unmotivated to learn. Students' lack of motivation leads to boredom and unresponsiveness in the classroom.

Besides, communication in the classroom is teacher-dependent (Gangavarapu et al., 2022). Hence, it relates to the teacher's approachability. The ability of students to interact in the classroom is influenced by teachers who are objective in allocating opportunities for interaction and provide constructive and encouraging feedback (Gangavarapu et al., 2022). Teachers have to offer equal space for students to express their ideas. Thus, according to Nurrohmah and Adi (2021), teachers need to apply "an innovative teaching method that makes the students more interested in the class and treats the students as their learning partner" (p. 69).

On the other hand, students' silence can be positive. It can mean they have understood the material and not confused nor had questions, waited for teachers to choose them to answer the question, or needed time to consider and prepare the answer (Gangavarapu et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2022; Zafarina, 2022).

2.1.2 Model of Interpretation

Model of Interpretation is a socio-pragmatic framework proposed by Kurzon that highlights intentionality as vital in interpreting silence. The framework concentrates on the silent response to a question; as we relate to various kinds of discourse, the context will gradually be enlarged. Kurzon (1998) suggested that another approach, more widely semiotic rather than linguistic, must be employed to solve the issue. Furthermore, the broader extralinguistic context in which silence occurs should also be considered. To achieve this, we need to address the relevant aspects of symbolic human interaction discussed in the literature on general sociolinguistics, social psychology, and conversational analysis. As a result, the framework includes socio-psychological and linguistic (pragmatic) components (Kurzon, 1995). Additionally, Kurzon distinguishes that silence's meaning is highly dependent upon context and has to be interpreted culturally specific.

Kurzon applies a model interpretation of an individual's silence to reveal their reasons for not speaking with 'knowledge' or 'ability to speak' as initial points for consideration. Moreover, Kurzon's framework highlights intentionality as a vital role in interpreting silence, which makes it a broad framework that involves the ability to speak and psychological inhibitions. He suggests that the ability/inability to speak should be considered when analyzing silence. Thus, he categorizes the inability to talk into two categories: gaps in knowledge and psychological conditions (anxiety, shyness, and others).

Kurzon's modal interpretation of silence seems to be a helpful tool for determining an individual's general cause for remaining silent and not answering a question orally. There are three possible interpretations of silence by Kurzon (1988):

a) Unintentional silence

Psychological inhibitions cause the individual's silence – 'I cannot speak.' For instance, when the students feel shy, unconfident, or even afraid to speak, they are uncontrolled. The student did not intend to be silent, but they have no control over their response or are often said to be "tongue-tied".

b) Intentional silence – Internal

The silence is due to the individual's own choice – 'I will not/shall not speak'. It relates to the individual's willingness to speak. For instance, when the student refuses to answer the question given by the teacher. The reasons may be because they do not want to answer or they do not want to admit that they do not know the answer. It is usually linked with silence as a form of ignorance (Kurzon, 1998). Thus, it is the individual's genuine choice to be silent.

c) Intentional silence – External

The individual's silence is due to an external source – 'I must not/may not speak'. In this case, the individual may know the answer, but they may not permitted or under an obligation to speak (Kurzon, 1998). The reason for being silent has nothing to do with ignorance. For instance, the student chooses to remain silent instead of answering the teacher's question since s/he receives a threat or suggestion from another student not to answer it.

2.2 Study of Relevant Research

Silence in the classroom has been mentioned in several past works. Maher (2021) examines the relationship between language learners' anxiety and in-class silent behavior. 17 Japanese EFL students participated and attributed their silence and speaking anxiety to a lack of linguistic ability. Furthermore, negative predictions that feared them influenced their silent behaviors, classmates' reactions towards their performance, and self-focus images. On the other hand, a study by Hanh (2020) investigates the silent behavior of English-majored students at a university in Vietnam. The findings mentioned the causes of students' classroom silence from learners and teacher factors. In the teacher factor, the researcher mentioned unsuitable teacher-centered teaching methods and associated them with a lack of classroom engagement.

Conversely, Zafarina (2022) identified causes for silence and students' expectations in EFL classrooms in her study. The study revealed that the participants preferred to get more exposure to oral English through classroom activities that they consider engaging and fun. It also mentioned that 80.49% of participants strongly agreed to have an English teacher who gives more examples of speaking English. Thus, each study above reveals that there are numerous factors affecting students' silence. It can be from the student itself, peers, or teachers.

Regardless of the immense research on silence in EFL classrooms, research in junior high school settings is less existing. Studies mentioned above were conducted in high schools and universities. Moreover, Hanh and Zafarina's study reflects that teacher is one of the factors affecting students' silence. Nevertheless, less attention has been given to pre-service teachers who lack experience in teaching. Hence, the participants in this research were junior high school students taught by a pre-service teacher. Furthermore, the present study narrows its focus to investigate students' silence, precisely when students are required to respond to direct questions from teachers, such as during question-and-answer sessions and interactive activities like games, rather than examining silence throughout the entire

learning process. Therefore, the role of intentionality behind students' silence is examined in this study.