

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Silence is a condition where someone does not produce any sounds or speaking. When it happens during an interaction, can be diversely interpreted, positively or negatively. Silence can be defined as a permanent trait (Bao, 2019), a form of ignorance (Kurzon, 1995), a communication strategy (Bao, 2019), and many more. According to Saville-Troike (1985, as cited in King, 2013), silence is a nonverbal and non-fixed act of communication demonstrated by the subject of the communication. Thus, silence should generally be placed among nonverbal communication and have an intentional communicative function.

However, in EFL classes, the silence phenomenon is considered a problem since students are not involved in expressing their ideas or thoughts. According to Hanh (2020), silence is a common phenomenon that both teachers and students find to be an obstacle to the teaching and learning process. Students tend to be silent during the learning process instead of actively participating in answering questions and expressing ideas. This phenomenon can be perceived as unfavorable since the interaction between the teacher and students is essential in language learning (Wang, 2019). The reasons students are silent may vary; it can be positive and negative. Students may choose to be silent to show their respect and thoughtfulness. On the other hand, they may find it difficult to speak due to limited vocabulary; they may feel shy, insecure, and not confident to speak; or they may feel bored during the learning process (Bahar et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this phenomenon is unavoidable for pre-service teachers, too. Through the teaching practicum, pre-service teachers can experience teaching English to students of other languages in the real world and learn about the complexity of current classroom practices (Fajardo & Miranda, 2015 as cited in Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018). Due to a lack of experience in teaching, this phenomenon might be unexpected for pre-service teachers. They may get anxious about their readiness as a teacher (Subekti, 2021).

The silence phenomenon also occurs in one of the Junior high schools in Tasikmalaya. Based on preliminary observation, English teachers at this school are required to provide students with more opportunities to learn independently. Thus, the students need to speak more by asking questions and performing. However, some students tend to be silent during the learning process, especially when the teacher asks questions. Classroom participation is one way for teachers to measure students' competency during the learning process. By only answering quick questions, teachers can determine students' comprehension of the material and fluency in speaking English. Moreover, it can reflect what is lacking in the teaching-learning process and determine the next step to achieve the learning objectives. However, if students tend to be silent throughout the learning process, the teacher cannot measure their competency. Consequently, the researcher found this setting interesting to investigate since most of the activities are student-centered.

Many studies reveal that students choose not to speak or respond to the teacher for several reasons. The studies highlight silence as a form of language incompetence, psychological issues, and teacher factors (Adamson, 2022; Gangavarapu et al., 2022; Hanh, 2020; Maher, 2021; Pratama et al., 2021; Zafarina, 2022). However, fewer studies of students' silence in junior high school settings during pre-service teacher programs exist. Previous research predominantly focused on investigating students' silence in higher education contexts.

Therefore, this study will investigate the reasons behind students' silence. Moreover, silence highly depends on the context for its interpretation (Kurzon, 1988). Thus, Kurzon's model interpretation of silence will be applied to explore the students' silence. King (2013) suggests that the researcher investigating silence in educational settings will find Kurzon's theory particularly interesting, as he emphasizes the crucial role played by intentionality in interpreting silence.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background above, the researcher addressed the following question, "What are the students' reasons behind their silence?"

1.3 Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding, the researcher inserts several operational definitions interrelated to the study, as shown below:

1.3.1. Silence

Silence is a form of reaction and behavior from EFL students during the learning process. It refers to not being responsive or making vocal contributions whenever the teacher asks questions.

1.3.2. EFL Students

EFL students are the participants whose tend to be silent during the the pre-service teacher's teaching practicum.

1.3.3. Model of Interpretation

Kurzon's model of interpretation is the framework for interpreting silence's meaning. Thus, the framework is adapted to determine the reasons behind EFL students' silence in the classroom.

1.4 Aims of the Study

This study aims to find out the EFL students' reasons for their silence in classroom. It aims to get detailed explanations from silent students through Kurzon's model of interpretation, which relates to their intentionality for being unresponsive and tend to be silent during the learning process.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Practical Significance

This study is expected to be useful for English Education students before performing their teaching practicum. It will provide an image of the students' silence phenomenon in the EFL classroom. Thus, it is expected to enhance English Education students' readiness, understanding, and motivation in teaching.

1.5.2 Empirical Significance

This study will provide new insights into the students' silence phenomenon by addressing why the students choose to be silent during the learning process.