CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an overview and comprehensive conclusions of the research findings that were presented and discussed in depth in Chapter IV. Through a strict process of methodological triangulation of classroom observation data, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires, this chapter summarizes the essence of the findings to provide definitive answers to the three research questions. In addition to presenting the sociolinguistic and pedagogical conclusions drawn from the field, this chapter also outlines theoretical contributions and offers a number of tactical recommendations and constructive suggestions. These suggestions are intended for English teachers, educational institutions, and future researchers interested in developing classroom discourse studies, particularly in optimizing the role of micro-responses to create a communicative foreign language learning environment.

5.1 Conclusion

According to the analysis of multimodal discourse data regarding the first research question, this study concludes that the characteristics of verbal backchannel use in EFL classroom discourse are marked with a sharp asymmetry in interaction between teachers and students. The teacher maintains full verbal control by dominating verbal token production (77.8%), manifested through the use of continuer tokens ("*Uh-huh*," '*Mhm*') and agreement tokens ("*Okay*"), which serve to validate students' turn-taking rights and maintain the flow of communication to prevent it from breaking off. Conversely, students remain very passive verbally and produce only minimal verbal tokens, such as the word "*Owh*," as a change-of-state token to signal the reception of new information without any intention of taking the turn. Interestingly, the teacher's verbal restraint in the classroom is proven to be an intentional and considered instructional strategy. Teachers consciously apply the technique of delayed backchanneling to respect the strict boundaries of Backchannel Opportunity Points (BOPs), ensuring that students' thought processes as they struggle to construct English sentences are not disrupted by external verbal interruptions.

Regarding the second research question on non-verbal modalities, this study concludes that visual paralinguistic signals act as the most dominant and constant driving force of interaction in the EFL classroom, with a total of 183 occurrences. These non-verbal signals are dominated by focused eye gaze and nodding from the students as their primary channels for expressing active engagement amidst their linguistic limitations. Through these visual channels, students can silently confirm their cognitive understanding without being burdened by the anxiety of spontaneously producing the target language. Additionally, this study successfully deconstructed the traditional interpretation of the student gesture of resting the chin on the hand. This unique gesture, which appeared 21 times, was found not to represent boredom or fatigue, but rather a physical mechanism intentionally employed by students to maintain bodily calm and sustain continuous attention while absorbing complex classroom discourse.

Finally, regarding the functional contribution of micro-responses, this study concludes that backchannels possess a dual nature that significantly influences learners' cognitive and psycho-affective dimensions. Positively, the combination of nods, smiles, and friendly verbal cues from the teacher acts as interactional scaffolding that rescues students when they experience word-searching, as well as functioning as teacher immediacy behaviours that were perceived as helping lower affective barriers and supporting students' self-confidence and willingness to communicate. However, negatively, if the teacher's verbal response occurs at the wrong moment before BOPs is achieved, that response turns into a structural interruption that disrupts students' cognitive focus. An even more negative impact is found in the phenomenon of zero-backchanneling, where the teacher's silence accompanied by a flat facial expression is interpreted by students as a verdict of linguistic failure, which some students perceived as increasing anxiety, a sense of being ignored, and reducing their willingness to continue speaking. Thus, responsive, adaptive, and timely backchannels appear to be an important interactional component in creating a supportive EFL classroom environment.

5.2 Suggestion

Based on all the research findings and conclusions outlined above, a number of theoretical and practical recommendations can be made to various parties directly

involved in the foreign language learning ecosystem. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, this study strongly recommends that they begin to develop a high level of critical awareness (conscious interactional awareness) regarding the use of backchannels in the classroom. Teachers should no longer view nods, smiles, or word choices such as "*Okay*" and "*Mhm*" as insignificant communication responses, instead they should be viewed as instruments of formative assessment and agents of scaffolding that occur in real time. Teachers are advised to be more aware of interactional timing when offering verbal responses, referencing the concept of Backchannel Opportunity Points (BOPs). It is crucial for teachers to exercise control and apply delayed responses when they detect students struggling to find the right words (word-searching) to avoid triggering structural interruptions that disrupt students' cognitive focus. On the other hand, teachers must actively avoid silent, expressionless behaviour (zero-backchanneling) because a tense atmosphere of silence has been shown to reduce students' willingness to communicate due to high language anxiety. The use of warm interpersonal strategies, such as the judicious use of humour and code-switching to the local language, is also highly recommended to continue bridging the psychological gap between teachers and students.

For students learning English as a foreign language, the suggestion is to make more optimal and confident use of non-verbal modalities as a bridge for communication. Given the linguistic limitations commonly faced by second-language learners, students need not feel inferior or afraid when they are not yet able to spontaneously produce long, perfect English sentences. Students can maximize the use of non-verbal backchannels, such as maintaining focused eye contact and offering nods of confirmation, as safe yet active ways to demonstrate their learning engagement in the classroom. Additionally, students are encouraged to begin practicing the reciprocal use of light verbal backchannels while listening to presentations or explanations from their peers, thereby creating an interactive, collaborative, and supportive oral classroom discourse environment independently among learners without always relying on stimuli from the teacher.

Finally, for future researchers interested in the field of EFL classroom discourse analysis, this study is expected to serve as a starting point for expanding

the scope of research on listener responses. Considering that this study is limited to a descriptive qualitative scope with a homogeneous sample size at the high school level, future researchers are advised to explore this backchannel phenomenon using mixed-methods or quantitative approaches with a larger and more diverse participant sample, such as university or elementary school students. Future studies could also focus on investigating the effectiveness of implementing backchannels in the context of digital (online) or hybrid learning environments, which present distinct challenges regarding visual interaction. Additionally, future researchers may conduct experimental studies on the long-term impact of explicit backchannel strategy training on students' speaking fluency and oral academic achievement.