**An Analysis of Factors Causing Students’ Reticence in Speaking Classes**

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| **Article History**  Received : June 16th, 2024  Revised : July 08th, 2024  Accepted : August 12th, 2024 | **Abstract:** This research describes factors causing many students in an EFL classroom struggle with speaking due to reticence, which significantly impacts their language learning and academic achievement. This study aims to identify and describe the factors causing students' reticence and propose possible strategies to cope with students' reticence in speaking classes in the English Education Department. It applied a descriptive qualitative approach, chosen specifically to offer a straightforward description of the phenomenon of the research. Data collection for this study was carried out using observation and interviews. This study involved 13 students as the sample of reticence students. The results revealed nine (9) key factors causing students' reticence in speaking classes. These include anxiety, personality (introverted), lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and low English proficiency. Additionally, fear of negative evaluation, unwillingness to participate, comparison with peers, and uncomfortable classroom atmosphere were identified as significant contributors to students' reluctance to engage in speaking activities. The findings also comprise the strategies to cope with students’ reticence in speaking classes involved classroom arrangements which refers to students’ seating position that makes students participate more and enjoy the class with their peers and using an appropriate teaching method.  **Keywords:** Anxiety, Confidence, Proficiency, Reticence. |

**INTRODUCTION**

Speaking is a crucial skill in an EFL classroom setting (Branden, Bygate, and Norris, 2009) because many students desire the ability to communicate in class activities to express ideas to others, with the result that both speakers can comprehend (Luoma 2004). To do so, they must consider a number of interrelated factors, including ideas, the language used, and how to respond to interlocutors (Putra, 2020:8). The term "speaking skill" encompasses a number of elements, including the ability to utilize a comprehensive vocabulary, pronounce words correctly, demonstrate an understanding of grammar, and so forth. When students want to engage in spoken communication, they must consider all those factors (Haryudin & Jamilah, 2018: 59).

Unfortunately, many students struggle with speaking in the classroom. Students’ reticence in speaking is a common challenge that language teachers often encounter (Aripin & Umam, 2019). Riasati (2014: 115) stated that reticence is the phenomenon related to students’ unwillingness to speak and take part in classroom activities". Reticence is the term used to describe the state in which people avoid communicating because they feel they will lose more by speaking up than by remaining silent (Phillips, 1996). Reticence in this study is related to the phenomenon when students are reluctant or unwillingness to participate actively in classroom discussions in front of their peers. Many times in speaking class, they tend to be silent. Students' reticence in speaking class is a common issue that can have significant consequences on students' language learning and academic achievement. This situation is quite noticeable in English classes at all levels of education including his/her education instituting because it contradicts planned teaching activitites and general attitude toward the courses being pursued (Cieniewicz, 2007). Consequently, students cannot effectively master English well if they are reluctant to participate fully in the speaking class.

The researchers used three previous studies as the reference for this study. In thestudy conducted by Wulandari et al. (2015), the focus was on students in the light vehicle engineering class at Vocational High School 2. The research identified lack of confidence and fluency as major reasons for students' reticence in speaking. The influence of parents, peers, and teachers on enhancing students' oral fluency was also highlighted. This study provides insights into the specific challenges faced by students in a technical education setting and emphasizes the role of various stakeholders in addressing reticence issues.

On the other hand, Irwanti et al. (2017) conducted a study using a case study method to explore students' reticence in speaking. Their research involved 12 participants and delved into the factors contributing to student silence in the classroom. The findings from this study shed light on the individual experiences of students and how these experiences impact their willingness to speak up. By employing a case study approach, Irwanti et al. offered a detailed examination of reticence phenomena within a specific context. In a different setting, Augustin (2017) focused on reticent students in the English Club at Kebon Dalem Junior High School. Through interviews with 40 students, the study revealed insights into the underlying reasons for student reticence, such as lack of confidence and fluency. The role of parents, peers, and teachers in fostering students' oral communication skills was also emphasized. By concentrating on a specific extracurricular setting, this research provides a nuanced understanding of reticence issues outside the traditional classroom environment.

Those previous studies focus on the factors and reasons why students are reticent but do not reveal further the appropriate solution to overcome the student reticence phenomenon. Thus, the current study was conducted to identify further the factors that cause students' reticence in English-speaking classes. Understanding the cause of students' reticence in the classroom will contribute to the discussion of why students are reticent to speak and find out the possible strategies to cope with reticent students in speaking classes. Therefore, the aim of the study is to identify internal and external factors and propose possible strategies to cope with students' reticence conducted at an English study program in one of the state-run universities in Mataram.

**METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method as outlined by Creswell (2007) and was conducted at a state-run university in Mataram during the 2022/2023 academic year. The total population was 240 third-semester students in the academic year 2022/2023 which was divided into eight classes with the sample selected through non-probability sampling technique. According to Sugiyono (2018:82), non-probability sampling is a sampling technique that does not provide equal opportunities for each member of the population to become a sample. The researchers chose as many reticent students as possible through observation. There were 13 students who were categorized as reticent students. Those reticence students selected through purposive sampling technique. According to Sugiyono (2018:82), purposive sampling is sampling technique with certain considerations. In this study, the consideration is reticent students. The researchers select participants based on reticent students categories. The data collection techniques reffered to Sugiyono (2019) which carried out by observing, interviews reticent students, and documentation. Data collection was conducted by observing three classes in the Advanced Oral Communication course, noting the names of students who were reluctant to speak and noting their activities during the class. Subsequently, in-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with the reticent students. The documentation collected includes journals related to this research, students' participation notes, and photographs taken during the study. Data triangulation was used to validate the data.

Furthermore, the techniques of data analysis of this study referred to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014:14) consist of data condensation (which referred to the process of coding the initials of reticent students and selecting data related to factors causing students reticence and possible strategies to cope with students reticence , focusing the data according to the research questions of this study, abstracting the data , and transforming data by categorizing the data and summarizing it into easily understandable sentences, transcribing voice recording data from interviews into text, and analyzing data obtained from documents), displaying the data that had been categorized from the findings of observations and interviews narratively, and drawing conclusion to present the brief answers to the research questions based on the presentation and discussion of findings about factors causing students reticence and the possible strategies to cope with students reticence.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings**

The researcher obtained 13 reticent students from three classes and interviewed them about their experiences in speaking class. The lecturer divided students into three groups based on their speaking fluency and participation: Group A (fluent and active), Group B (moderately fluent and active), and Group C (less active and fluent). The study's respondents were from Group C, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Initials of reticent students

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Students Initial Name | Respondent Code |
| 1. | NMK | Student A |
| 2. | MRI | Student B |
| 3. | FZ | Student C |
| 4. | MAH | Student D |
| 5. | MA | Student E |
| 6. | MAH | Student F |
| 7. | MWR | Student G |
| 8. | LAZ | Student H |
| 9. | J | Student I |
| 10. | MF | Student J |
| 11. | MR | Student K |
| 12. | JU | Student L |
| 13. | IM | Student M |

Based on the students’ responses to the interview questions, the findings revealed the research questions of this study. It was found some factors causing students’ reticence and some possible strategies to cope with reticent students.

1. **Factors Causing Students’ Reticence in Speaking Class**

Based on the data, the researchers found nine factors causing students reticence in speaking class after conducting an interview as follows:

* 1. **Anxiety**

Most of the students interviewed stayed quiet because they felt nervous during speaking classes causing their minds to go blank and make them forget what they wanted to say, and they chose not to speak.

"*Sometimes I want to speak up to express my opinion, but when I want to try to speak, I get nervous, my mind goes blank*."

-- Student D

"*I feel more nervous when my name is suddenly called to answer questions by the lecturer. I am more anxious when I have to give my opinion to the lecturer than to my friends*."

--Student G

"*Hmm, I tend not to express my opinion because when I want to do so, I'm afraid I'll say something wrong, which makes me nervous, and I have a kind of panic attack. I suffer from hyperhidrosis, so, when I'm nervous, I sweat a lot. So, when in speaking class, when I feel pressure, I'd rather stay quiet because I cannot think clearly and my mind goes blank. So, I would better play it safe.*"

-- Student K

* 1. **Personality**

Some students kept quiet in class because some of them were too shy and introverted person causing them to rarely speak to others,

“*I am an introvert person. I do not like to talk with others because I have no topic to talk about. So, hmm, I used to be silent many times in class*."

--Student C

“*I rarely give opinions in speaking class because I am a shy person. Sometimes, I feel afraid and embarrassed to speak up in front of my friends*.”

--Student H

“*I am rarely active to participate because I am shy and often feel afraid to speak in English. In class, I also rarely interact with other friends. I prefer to be alone. Maybe you could say that I am an introvert*."

--Student I

* 1. **Lack of confidence**

Many students did not feel confident speaking in front of the class. Most of the reticence students talked softly among themselves while the classroom discussion occurred.

“*I do not have any confidence at all so I choose to be silent. Sometimes, I have an idea or something to ask, but I am not confident at all. I feel that my oral skills are still very lacking. I am not confident in my abilities. That is why I prefer to be silent*”

--Student H

**“***Hmm, sometimes, I want to participate in answering questions or conveying opinions but I don't have the courage and confidence to speak up because I may not be correct."*

*--*Student J

* 1. **Lack of motivation**

The students stated that English was not their passion. There was advice from their closest relatives who advised them to major in English, which apparently was not their passion.

“*Actually, I entered the English department because of my uncle's suggestion. English is not really my interest. However, because I was curious, I tried to follow my uncle's advice. But apparently, it is not my passion. But yes, it must continue because it has already happened. So, I just learned it as it is*”.

--Student K

“*Honestly, I decided to enter the English department because of the invitation and advice of my friends. At that time I was also confused about choosing a major. So, I chose English. But after that, I felt unable to adapt my skills in English. But there was no other choice, so I continued studying as usual. I do not have any motivation or expectations for myself in this English department*”.

--Student D

* 1. **Low English proficiency**

Based on the interview, all of the reticent students keep being reticent because of poor English proficiency. They tended to be silent because they felt worried and unconfident about their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and word choice to make a good sentence.

"*I just do not have enough confidence. Sometimes, I already have an opinion that I want to convey but it is still in Indonesian. Well, I had quite a hard time converting it into English*."

--Student D

“*I prefer to remain silent because when I want to speak, I am confused about how to say it, I am confused about how to make the right sentences. Vocabulary and grammar are my weaknesses*”.

--Student F

* 1. **Fear of negative evaluation**

The students were afraid when they made a mistake when speaking, and that it would become a laughing stock for their classmates, causing them to be reluctant to speak.

"*I am afraid that if I say something wrong or choose the wrong word, it will give my friends a misinterpretation. So, the meaning of what I am talking about is difficult or even different for the listener’s understanding*”.

--Student E

“*I would feel embarrassed if I made a mistake when speaking. I am afraid that when I speak, there will be wrong vocabulary or pronunciation and if that happens, it will make me feel mentally down and feel traumatized about speaking up again. I feel like people will intimidate me, even though that might be not the case. So, I prefer to choose silence*”

-- Student I.

* 1. **Being Unwilling to Participate**

There was no willingness from the students to improve their English skills. Some other students said they were unwilling to participate because they did not have any preparation before class, for example, they did not know what material and topics would be discussed during class.

“*Because of my limited skills in English, I am reluctant to participate in speaking classes. Instead of having to make mistakes, it is better for me to be quiet and just listen to the flow of learning*"

--Student F.

"*I understand the topic/material being discussed. But yeah, I am just too lazy to participate*”.

-- Student J.

"*Sometimes I do not have any preparation before starting speaking class, so I do not know what I'm going to do during speaking class*”.

--Student K

* 1. **Comparison and Dominating of Peers**

Many reticent students strongly believe that their English ability is not as good as their friends. They experienced feelings of anxiety, discomfort, and envy due to these perceived differences. They regularly compared themselves to classmates, resulting in feelings of inferiority.

"*Sometimes, I am insecure with other friends if they speak up, they can speak fluently and confidently. Meanwhile, because of my limited knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, I cannot speak fluently and confidently like them.*"

--Student B

“*Many times in class I mostly stay quiet and just listen. My friends who are good at speaking often answer and give opinions, and I just listen because even if I speak I am afraid I will make a mistake, so I'd rather be quiet and just listen*”.

--Student D

"*I feel embarrassed when I speak and it turns out that I make mistakes whether in word* choice*, grammar, or pronunciation, I am embarrassed by my friends, most of them good at English*"

--Student I

* 1. **Classroom Atmosphere**

The other opinion from other students also showed that they felt uncomfortable when they were demanded to talk and it made them not want to talk. So that, sometimes it creates pressure for students.

“.. *hmm I sometimes really want to be able to demonstrate my speaking ability in front of the class but I do not, because of my limited speaking skills, I would rather stay silent than make a mistake later. Maybe if the lecturer helps us who have difficulty composing words in speaking English, maybe it can make us more courageous to speak without having to be afraid of making mistakes*”.

--Student B

“*Sometimes the way of learning is like demanding me to speak when I do not have the willingness to speak. Especially if certain topics are not interesting to me. In addition, I am an introvert and I really do not want to waste my energy to talking. So, there was pressure on myself when I learned how to speak in a learning situation like that*”.

--Student C

“*I often feel afraid to speak in front of friends and lecturers, because sometimes if I make a mistake it makes me the center of attention of my friends. It felt like the other friends were looking at me when I made a mistake. I am not comfortable being the center of attention in class. I became nervous so I didn't dare to try it again.*”

--Student I

1. **Possible Strategies to Cope with Students’ Reticence**

Based on the findings from the interviews with the reticent students in speaking class, the researchers found two possible strategies to cope with students’ reticence in order to reduce students’ reticence in speaking. Those strategies include:

* 1. **Classroom Arrangement**

The students enjoy the speaking class more if the class is arranged in groups rather than the usual study seating position.

"*I am more comfortable learning speaking in a group than in a class arranged sitting in a row because I am more nervous in larger class situations. A class situation like that where I made the slightest mistake while speaking would definitely become the center of attention. I am very uncomfortable being the center of attention of my friends. Practice speaking in a group makes me feel freer about whatever I want to say without having to worry a lot and be afraid of whether it is wrong or right*”.

--Student B

*" I have more courage to speak if the class is arranged in groups according to friends whose abilities are like mine. So, my friends and I who have low speaking skills can help each other and that makes us not feel insecure*”.

--Student D

*"so far I have enjoyed learning, but if the class settings are made in larger class conditions, it makes me less confident and there is no one to cover me when I make mistakes and if the class is setting in the bigger classroom discussion, it makes it difficult for me to get the opportunity to speak up. So, I feel comfortable more to speak with my friends in a group*”.

–Student C

Based on the interview conducted, it is depicted that a classroom arranged for small group discussion can make students feel more comfortable and make them more confident in speaking classes.

* 1. **Teaching Method**

The reticent students thought the teaching method was too demanding for them as they have to be able to speak up at any time they are nominated.

“*So, that makes me nervous and I can't think about an opinion. It would be better for me to volunteer to speak up. So, I was embarrassed when I was appointed to speak up, and I had to stand in front of my friends to express my opinion. It made me nervous and I lacked confidence for that.*"

--Student E

“*In my opinion, learning to speak through movements is very fun and helps other friends who may have problems with vocabulary mastery like me to be able to remember the words we are going to say.*”

--Student L

“*In my opinion, a speaking class is more exciting if the learning is interactive, maybe like a group debate like yesterday. Group discussions also help us to get more practice in speaking, regardless of whether it is correct or not. For me personally, I like if the method of learning to speak is like that, especially if we use role-play, so, we are required to be more active in practicing our speaking skills*”.

--Student K

“*I prefer studying using the discussion group learning method because I feel like I can just be braver in practicing speaking with friends, so, we can interact more with speaking English, share ideas with each other in a group and it's also more comfortable because I'm not too nervous if I want to talk in a group*”.

--Student B

“*If I am in speaking class, and I am just given a topic and we should give feedback personally, in my opinion, it is too boring. So, I would prefer to learn to speak with a more exciting learning method. In my opinion, doing more improvisational activities and holding group discussions like this can help us to continue practicing speaking, so, we will get used to speaking English. And learning methods like that also does not make me nervous and bored because I think it was fun*”

--Student J

Most of the students interviewed stated that learning by interactive activity was more exciting in speaking class. As a result, they would not feel pressured, afraid, and nervous during speaking class.

**Discussion**

Interviews revealed two main factors involve internal and external factors contributing to students' reticence in speaking classes. Internal factors included anxiety, personality, lack of confidence, low English proficiency, and lack of motivation. All interviewed students reported nervousness when speaking, leading to mental blocks and confusion. This aligns with Keaten and Kelly (2000) and Horwitz (1986), who identified anxiety as a key contributor to reticence due to perceived ineptness and pressure. Personality traits such as introversion and shyness were significant factors. Seven students identified as introverts, who are typically quieter, while five were extroverts but still experienced reticence. McCroskey (1992), and Eysenck in Nuqul (2006) note that introverted and shy individuals often avoid speaking due to fear of mistakes and communication apprehension. Many students were not confident in speaking because they felt their speaking abilities were low, leading to insecurity and self-doubt. Doqaruni (2015) and Nunan (1999) highlight that self-confidence influences students’ reticence in speaking. All students mentioned challenges with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, hindering their ability to express ideas, consistent with Liu (2008) and Cheng (2020). Finally, three students cited unwillingness to participate in speaking class and lack of interest, influenced by external pressures or a lack of motivation and lack of interest in English, as noted by Nunan (1999) and Zua (2008).

External factors contributing to reticence included fear of negative evaluation, comparison and domination of peers, and classroom atmosphere. Almost all interviewed students feared making mistakes and receiving negative feedback from peers and teachers, as supported by Price (1991) and Ohata (2005). Students also felt inferior and anxious due to comparisons with more proficient peers, leading to decreased participation, as observed by Augustin (2017). Additionally, a strict classroom environment increased anxiety, while a supportive and friendly atmosphere encouraged participation, aligning with Irwanti (2017) and Liu (2007).

To address these issues, two strategies were identified. Classroom arrangement and creating a supportive environment were crucial. Students preferred small group discussions and felt more confident in a comfortable learning atmosphere. The lecturers should assist with language challenges and encourage peer support, consistent with Liu (2007) and Zeng (2010). Teaching methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Total Physical Response (TPR) can increase students’ engagement and confidence in speaking classes. CLT focuses on interaction and social activities, while TPR uses body movements to aid vocabulary retention. These methods are supported by Qoriah and Farisya (2022), Littlewood (1981), Richard and Rogers (2001), Li and Liu (2011), and Ulya (2021).

**CONCLUSION**

The students' reticence in speaking classes is influenced by internal factors such as anxiety, personality (introverted), lack of confidence, low English proficiency, and lack of motivation. And the external factors such as fear of negative evaluation, comparison and dominating peers, and classroom atmosphere. To address this issue, creating a classroom arrangement in a group class discussion to make students participate more in speaking classes with their peers, creating a supportive classroom environment, involving the role of lecturers to engage students more actively in oral activities, and employing interactive teaching methods such as CLT and TPR can help students overcome reticence and participate more confidently in speaking activities, ultimately can enhance their language learning experience and skills. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for further research to explore the effectiveness of specific language learning interventions tailored to address students' reticence in speaking classes. Investigating the long-term impact of implementing these strategies on students' speaking skills and confidence levels would provide valuable insights for educators and researchers in the field of language education.

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