TEACHERS STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH STUDENTS’ RETICENCE IN ENGLISH CLASSES IN A STATE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN SALATIGA

THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Sarjana Pendidikan

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SALATIGA
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THESIS
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INTRODUCTION

Students’ reticence is a common phenomenon that occurs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. This means students are reluctant to participate in English class actively (Johnson, as cited in Donald, 2010). The class becomes relatively quiet, which makes the teaching and learning environment not run smoothly. Hashimoto, Yashima, Liu, as cited in Lee and Ng (2009) claim that there are some factors that affect students’ reticence in class, such as students’ motivation, confidence, and anxiety. The students who have lack of motivation are lazy to learn English and it makes them to be reticent. Besides, if they do not have good speaking skill, they will be less confident and anxious in the English learning process.

However, the factors may not only be from the students. Teachers are also the contributing factor that makes students’ reticence. Because teachers are the ones who typically handle the situation in class, they determine the content of the class, the topics discussed and who can speak and when (Walsh, as cited in Lee & Ng, 2009). If a teacher determines who can speak and when, then the students will think that they do not have to participate actively in the class. Based on my own experience, as long as teachers do not ask the students to speak, they will keep silent. Moreover, teachers usually do not like silence. If the teacher asks a question and none of the students answer them, it seems to mean they failed to gain students’ responses. Teachers will repeat the question and attempt to appoint a particular student to answer the question. If this is failed, then the teachers will provide the answer themselves. Liu and Jackson (2009) argue that such a situation leads to the imbalance of turns between the teachers and students and it will promote students’ reticence. In this situation, the student who
is appointed to answer the question seemed to feel under pressure (Liu & Jackson, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers’ strategies to make the students actively participate in English class instead of being reticent, especially in English class. This study will contribute to EFL classroom to help the teachers reduce students’ reticence.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study will discuss the definition of students’ reticence, factors that account for students’ reticence, how to deal with students’ reticence, review of previous study, and theoretical framework.

**Students’ reticence**

Reticence among English as a Second Language (ESL)/EFL students is not a new phenomenon. It is common, especially in Asia. According to Keaton and Kelly (2000), as cited in Li and Liu (2011), reticence occurs because the students believe that it is better to keep on silent than look foolish and reticence is a communication problem with mental, emotional, and social aspects. I emphasize that students’ reticence is students’ way to avoid communication in a situation where they can get a bad evaluation. Li and Liu (2011) claim, “In their minds, reticence is typified by a set of faulty beliefs about communication” (p. 961). I agree with Li and Liu because students think that their friend who can speak spontaneously must be born as good speakers. Students think that way because they feel that they are not competent in speaking.

**Factors that account for students’ reticence**
According to Tsui, as cited in Zhang and Head (2010), the factors that contribute to students’ reticence are:

Learners’ inability to understand what the teacher is saying, teachers’ low tolerance of silence (the teachers tend to answer their own question if the students do not answer right away) and, perhaps most significantly, learners’ fear of embarrassing themselves by making mistakes. (p. 2)

Students sometimes do not understand the teachers’ saying because the teachers may just be too fast when speaking or they use words that students do not understand. Students also fear of embarrassment, if they are wrong when answer a question or speak up about an idea. They are also afraid if their peers mock them. However, the problem is not only with the students but also with the teachers. Teachers are impatient when it comes to waiting for the students to answer the question. They end up answering the question themselves, which in turn might make the students nervous and they become less confident.

Donald (2010) claims that students think that if they speak English during a learning process, the teachers will judge and evaluate them. The students are afraid if the teacher gives a bad evaluation on them and “being viewed as incompetent” (Allwright & Bailey, as cited in Zhang & Head, 2010, p. 2). If a teacher judges a particular student as being incapable, the other students might as well. That particular student dislikes if the other students also judge him or her the same as what the teacher does. This kind of thinking will also result in students’ reticence.

The other factor is related to turn taking (Harumi, 2011). Turn taking means the chance provided by a teacher for the students to speak. Usually teachers ask students a question and appoint them to answer it. However, the turns are not allocated to the students. It can be happened because the students may miss the timing, for
example, and the other students speak spontaneously or the teachers move on to other students. Thus, the students have the difficulty to claim their turn and miss the chance to express their thoughts.

**How to deal with students' reticence**

In the past few years, some researchers have studied about how to deal with students’ reticence. Harumi (2011) argues that the teachers can stimulate students’ consciousness toward responding to questions by using “downgraded questioning” (p. 269). Downgraded questions are questions that are easy to understand. If a teacher uses such question, students may understand and they can respond the question. As I mention above about the turn taking, in order to make the turn taking allocated to all students, I think it is better if the teacher takes the initiative. This will allow other students to get a chance to speak.

According to Cliffton, as cited in Lee and Ng (2009), a teacher-fronted strategy can make the students more active in class because the teacher initiated the talk and it can reduce students’ reticence. The idea of teacher-fronted strategy is that a teacher talks all the time so students do not have chance to talk. However, the way teachers conduct their lesson and communicate with the students can influence students’ communication skill in class. For instance, the teacher shows a picture and asks the students what the picture is. Then, the students answer and the teacher provides a good response to students’ answer. It will encourage the students to speak up. Besides, Lee and Ng (2009) recommend teachers to conduct classes which focus more on meaning. As an illustration, teachers could use referential questions, to ask students or the students ask each other. Referential questions have no one specific answer such as
“what did you in the weekend?” or “why do you look so happy today?”. Another example is using backchannel to express that the teacher supports the students, like short quizzes, real time discussion in class, or encourage the students to ask anything that they did not understand. The use of feedback also focused more on content rather than the form. If the learning focuses on meaning, the students may take more initiative and responsibility for learning.

**Review of Previous Studies**

There are many theses on reticence done by English Language Education Program students of Satya Wacana Christian University. Mostly, they are about factors contributing to students’ reticence. For instance, Widyakusuma’s (2012) investigated factors contributing to students’ reticence in transactional speaking courses. Dewi’s (2013) examined factors contributing to students’ silence in integrated course classes. Sanju (2011) looked into factors contributing to students’ silence in transactional speaking classes, and so forth. The study about teachers’ strategies to deal with reticence is rare. There is one thesis that investigated the solution to reticence. For instance, Pranasti’s (2013) examined students’ silence experience on EFL classrooms. However, the solutions that Pranasti suggested are limited to students’ own initiatives to solve reticence.

Moreover, many published researchers have discussed a similar topic. For example, Lee and Ng (2010) discussed reducing student reticence through teacher interaction strategy; Zhang and Head (2010) presented about dealing with learner reticence in the speaking class. Lee and Ng (2010) discussed teacher fronted strategy and learner oriented strategy and Zhang and Head (2010) suggested to give students
more control. The studies, however, did not specifically suggest teachers’ strategies to deal with students’ reticence, especially in the Indonesian context. In this current study, I intend to explore teachers strategies to deal students’ reticence based on theory of Li and Liu (2011) about strategies to deal with students’ reticence which are more concern toward students’ behavior.

Theoretical framework

Li and Liu (2011) implore that there are some strategies to deal with students’ reticence which are more concerned about students’ behavior (e.g., students who are shy, do not know how to ask, and lack enthusiasm.). The teacher may use these strategies to deal with reticent students. I will use Li and Liu’s strategies as my theoretical framework.

Teachers’ strategies to deal with shy students. Dealing with shy students, teachers need to do direct interaction or discussion in small groups. Shy students usually do not like to talk much in front of many people. Besides, I think direct interaction like face-to-face interactions with fellow students may reduce their shyness since they do not have to talk in front of many people. In my opinion teacher can give reinforcement to encourage shy students.

Teachers’ strategies to deal with students who do not know how to ask. Teachers need to develop their oral skill and way of thinking by encouraging them to take another point of view of an idea. In addition, a teacher can ask the students to do role-play that make them get more practice and engage in a dialogue. They will study how to ask question or ask something that they do not understand and they will get used to it.
Teachers' strategies to deal with students who lack enthusiasm. If the students do not have enthusiasm in learning English, the teacher may investigate the reason why they do not have enthusiasm. Moreover, they can give reinforcement to them by praising them or make the learning more fun. Liu and Jackson (2009) argue that in order to make the students active in English class, the teacher has to boost students’ awareness and motivation to speak English.

The strategies could help other teachers to deal with students’ reticence. Besides, it would help the students to overcome reticence.

THE STUDY

This study used a qualitative study. The research question for this study is: what are teachers’ strategies to deal with students’ reticence in English classroom? The indicators for reticent students, as what I have discussed in more depth in the theoretical framework according to Li and Liu (2011), include those students who are shy, do not know how to ask question, and lack enthusiasm.

Context of study and Participants

The study was conducted in a state junior high school which is located in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. The participants of the study were four English teachers in the school. I was once a student teacher in that school, so I know the teachers quite well. They have been teaching English for 10-20 years. They have many experiences in dealing with the students.
Data Collection Method

I used a semi-structured interview, which is an interview that is similar to structured interview but it allows greater flexibility (Patton, 1990). The questions were open-ended so that I could get as much information as needed to find the strategies used in dealing with students’ reticence. I could get richer data because semi-structured interview is flexible. It provided more chance for me as the interviewer to raise follow-up questions. The interview questions were made by looking at the factors that contribute to students’ reticence. The interview process was recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and the data transcription was translated from Indonesian to English. The interview protocol is attached in Appendix A.

Data Analysis Procedure

I started the data analysis by reading all the transcripts collected from the interview sessions. Then, I highlighted the important statements from each participant and analyzed each statement. Analyzing each statement is important to categorize the statements and identify the emerging themes. The emerging themes were identified by looking at the strategies and factors contributing to students’ reticence, in view of Li and Liu’s (2011) conceptual framework.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After listening to the interview recording and reading the interview transcription, the strategies used by teachers to deal with reticence depended on the factors that contribute to students’ reticence. There are four emerging themes on teachers’
strategies to deal with students’ reticence. The emerging themes are teachers’
strategies to deal with students who are shy; students who do not know how to ask;
students who lack enthusiasm, and teachers who are not aware of their behavior. I will
discuss and analyze each topic as follows.

a. Teachers’ strategies to deal with shy students

Shy students usually do not feel comfortable with people. They talk less in front
of people. A participant, Teacher 1, suggest that discussion with friends could reduce
students’ shyness.

We could use small group work or discussion because shy students usually feel more comfortable
speaking with their friends. Another strategy is to ask the students to work in pair. Their pairs
usually are friends who sat beside them. The shy students can be more open when talking to their
friends. (Teacher 1, February 23, 2016)

From the teacher’s statements above, I notice that shy students could speak more
comfortably with their friends, especially friends who sat next to them. By asking
them to have a small group for discussion, shy students would not be discouraged from
speaking. Later on, they would overcome their shyness. Teacher 1 add, “Students are
more opened to their friends, so if I place myself as their friends probably they will
overcome their shyness.” This strategy could also help the shy students become more
open because students find the teacher less intimidating.

Besides, the teacher could give some encouraging words to make shy students
more open. When asked about what kind of encouragements the teacher give, Teacher
3 say, “I told the students that mistakes are not only made by the students, but I also
sometimes made mistakes. We both are learning, so don’t be shy.” By saying
motivational words, the students would listen and try to follow their teacher’s saying.
According to Alderman as cited in Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), giving
motivation to the students can create a collaborative learning atmosphere and help the students to reduce shyness.

Moreover, direct interaction between the teacher to the students can help the students overcome their shyness. The teacher can approach the students and use a referential question to ask them. Below is the Teacher 4 comment.

We [teachers] can approach them individually; asking something in English but still with simple question, such as “What is your favorite food?” “Why do you like rain?” and so forth. By doing this, I think the students will build their confidence and increase their enthusiasm. (Teacher 4, March 22, 2016)

Besides, he uses simple questions that have no exact answer to make the shy students opened. Asking such questions can instigate students’ interest because the questions are not burdensome. It is one of the strategies to reduce shyness.

b. **Teachers’ strategies to deal with students who do not know how to ask**

Students who do not know how to ask need to be exposed to verbal activities. Verbal activities help them to construct questions. Teachers 1, 2, and 4 believe that verbal activities such as role-play, oral test (oral simple quiz), and small conversation help the student to know how to ask. Below is a comment from Teacher 4 about how role-play can make students be able to ask.

I think role-play is a good strategy to help the students create a question. Usually before role-playing, I asked the students to make a dialogue first. The dialogue usually related to the material that has discussed. Prior to making dialogue, I asked the students to highlight the difficult vocabulary and sentence structures in the material. Then, they do the role-playing in front of the class. Using dialogue make them aware of the sentence structure. It would subconsciously help the students to construct a question. (Teacher 4, March 22, 2016)

The statements above show that role-play help the students to practice asking a question. Since in the role-play it involved asking and answering a question, the students are assumed to get used to it. Liu and Jackson (2009) support the teacher idea. They believe that scaffolding topics might help the students to get less confused when
asking a question. Teacher 4 hints the students to highlight difficult words and sentence structures before making the dialogue then they did role-play. It would make the students learn how to make a question.

A simple quiz that includes speaking may help the students who have difficulties in asking a question. However, the teacher should announce to the students long before the quiz is held. Teacher 1 recommends an interesting quiz below.

I suggest jumbled interrogative sentences as quiz help the students to understand how to ask something. I prepare the jumbled interrogative sentences in slide then the students have to answer by raising their hands. This kind of quiz was useful to the students who answered and students who could not answer. The students will try to arrange the words into a good question and unconsciously study how to construct questions. (Teacher 1, February 23, 2016)

From the extract above, it could be noticed that the students would think how to arrange the sentences and then they read the sentence that they have arranged. The students learn how to construct question in an interesting way.

Furthermore, a small conversation between teacher and students is the other strategy to deal with students who do not know how to ask. Regarding students who do not know how to ask, Teacher 2 comments below:

Mostly students do not know how to ask something in English. They just remain reticent. Sometimes I asked them ‘do you like chocolate?’ and then they responded. After that, I asked them to ask me something like what I just did. By doing this, it will help them to make more natural question.” (Teacher 2, March 22, 2016)

The students would try to make natural question, since the simple chatting is not related to the material and it is using vocabulary that they already knew. The teacher could use a “downgraded question” (Harumi, 2011) as well. Such questions can make the students raise their awareness to respond the questions.

c. Teachers’ strategies to deal with students who lack enthusiasm

Some participants, Teachers 1, 2, and 3 discuss some factors related to students’ lack of enthusiasm: being afraid of mockery, lazy to participate, not getting a chance
to speak. First, I will discuss how to deal with students who lack enthusiasm because of friends’ mockery. King (2013) claim that many reticent students do not want to participate in the class because of mockery. The students stay reticent to avoid negative judgment by their friends.

According to Dörnyei, as cited in Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), making fun of wrong answers is not acceptable because mistakes are natural when come to learning foreign language so a set of rules to prevent mockery must be applied. Therefore, Teacher 3 suggests, “Students’ reticence happen because of friends’ mockery that make them less enthusiastic. I warn the students who mock their friends and then I strongly prohibit mockery in English class.” However, the students must be reminded repeatedly so that the students can obey the rule.

Some of the students were lazy to participate in the class because they think that the teaching and learning will run smoothly even though they are not participating. Van Worde, as cited in Donald (2010), argues that fun learning will make the students more motivated. Fun learning can be done when the teacher creates a game. Below is Teacher 1’s comments on game that make the students enthusiastic.

When heard about game, students would enthusiastic all of sudden. I had a game related to the material when I taught about cardinal and ordinal number. Game using cards that have number on them. I divided the class into four group then each person in the group received two cards. After that, I said a number, for example, two hundred and fifteen. Each group has to be aware because they got the same number, the student who raised the card first get points for the group. They were enthusiastic and understood the material better. (Teacher 1, February 23, 2016)

From the extract above, it is noted that game will boost students’ enthusiasm and they will understand the material better because the students interest on what they were doing. Teacher 3 adds another attention-grabbing strategy as follows.

Students had usually better understand a material if we have a game. ‘Ask a question’ game, for instance. The teacher would point a student to answer his or her question and then the student had to answer it. After that, the student asks a question and point other students to answer, and
so on. Note that when asking the student to answer, the teacher gave the student time to think. This activity did not rush the students to think hastily. (Teacher 3, February 23, 2016)

Although the game seems to make the students burdensome, this activity is also beneficial to other students who do not answer the question. It is because the students would think about the responses and the question. Moreover, rewards can be given to the students in a form of points. The students will be enthusiastic if they received points.

Teachers are usually more attentive to the students who actively participated in the class. The active students are smart students and teachers’ favorite learners. Below is the comment from Teacher 2:

As a teacher, I should not be biased. I have to provide every student the chances to speak. I noticed that some students are reticent because some teachers only give the chance to the actively participated students. I asked some questions to the students and only certain students answer the question. Then for the next question, I would point a student to answer. Moreover, I could not rush the students so that they will not feel burdensome. (Teacher 2, March 22, 2016)

From the comment above, it can be noted that providing chances to speak is important. If the teacher just gives chances to certain students, the other students will think that the teacher is biased. Allocated the chances as what Teacher 2 did is a good strategy to trigger students’ enthusiasm. Morita, as cited in Zheng (2010), suggest that to make all the students in the class get chances, teacher intervention is needed.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore teachers’ strategies to deal with students’ reticence. To summarize the whole findings and to answer the research question on “what are teachers strategies to deal with students’ reticence in the English classes?”, this section presented the findings on teachers’ strategies to deal with students’ reticence in a state junior high school in Salatiga. In this study I found that there were some strategies to
deal with students who are shy, do not know how to ask, lack of enthusiasm, and teacher who do not aware of their behavior. A brief summary of the findings was described as follow.

First, teachers in the current study have strategies to deal with shy students. They are not comfortable interacting with many people. Small group discussion or doing work in pairs may help them to overcome their shyness. Working with their friends make the students more comfortable. Giving motivational words also help to encourage shy students to participate in the class. Direct interaction using referential questions may boost students’ comfort.

Second, dealing with students who do not know how to ask is considered to be important by some teachers in this current study. Scaffolding topics followed by role-playing help the students to construct a question. A quiz like jumbled sentences also helping them to study how to ask a question. Small conversation that doesn’t relate to the material make the students more natural when asking a question. Downgraded question could be used to raise students’ awareness toward responding question.

Lastly, it is crucial for teachers to deal with students who lack enthusiasm. The teacher can set a rule to prohibit mockery in class. Fun learning like games could boost students’ enthusiasm as well. The teacher should give the chances to answer questions to all students to avoid bias. Rewards in the form of points could make the students eager to participate in the class.

From all the findings presented above, it showed that teachers strategies to deal with students’ reticence depend on some factors that contribute to it. Every student in the class has different reason why they were reticent (i.e. shyness, not knowing how
to ask, and lack enthusiasm), so the strategies that teachers applied in the class are varied.

I would like to admit that this study has a limitation, especially with the findings of the data. This study only uses interview as the instrument of collecting data from the participants. Further research that integrates classroom observations, for instance, needs to be done to explore more about teachers’ strategies to deal with reticence.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, my deepest thanks goes to the Almighty God for blessing and giving me strength to complete my thesis. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Ernest Mambu, for his patience, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me all the time to write this thesis. I also want to deliver my gratitude to my examiner, Yustinus Calvin Gai Mali, M.Hum for providing the time to help me with the inputs and examine my thesis. A very special thanks goes out to the teachers for the time they gave to me to do the interviews. Their great contribution helped me to finish this thesis.

I would also like to thank my parents for the support they provided me through my entire life and my sister who always reminded me to complete the thesis. I would like to say thank you, too, Putri, Maul, Rency and other friends who always motivated me to finish this thesis. Thanks as well to my thesis classmate, Rintan who always listened to me and motivated me. Finally yet importantly, I would like to deliver my deepest gratitude to all the teachers in English department for teaching me the whole time I study in Satya Wacana Christian University.
REFERENCES


